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Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series. Volume 3 Number 9-12 and Volume 4 Number 1-2. February 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC.
Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 11.ii.2007, 6.30 am: ICRISAT campus, Patancheru.

ICRISAT is one of the richest birding spots around the city and a winter visit here is near-mandatory. The campus has a bird list of close to 80 birds, helped by two lakes and several smaller ponds. Water birds are usually plentiful and we could well notch up several bush birds as well as a few raptors. ICRISAT may also give us the Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. A Wryneck was seen here a couple of years ago and it should be interesting if it puts in an appearance again.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223).

Pitta is back!

We regret, dear readers, that we've been unable to bring out this newsletter these past few months due to what else but unavoidable circumstances. We are back however, and you will now hopefully have Pitta drop on your doormats every month.

It was heartening that the newsletter was sorely missed. This is just the moment to remember: it is the BSAP community that makes Pitta, as much as it is Pitta that binds us together. So if you have had birding experiences – notable and/or pleasurable sightings, observations, trip reports, backyard jottings, reminiscences... in fact, anything at all about birding in the state of Andhra Pradesh – please do share them with us. Write in to us at siraj.taher@gmail.com and sheetalvyas@gmail.com. Deadline for articles each month is the 22nd.

Happy Birding!

NEWS AND NOTES

Flycatcher Feast

BSAP trip report: Nirmal

By Arjun Surendra

Day 1: We all gathered bright and early at the Jubilee Bus Station, all set for the amazing amount of fun that awaited us. Five hours later, after a reasonably comfortable journey (with birding included, for those sitting by the windows) we were deposited right in front of the Forest Guest House, where we were given royal treatment all through our stay. We were welcomed with cups of tea, and after we unpacked, we had the privilege of meeting Mr Waheed, DFO, Nirmal. It was at his invitation that we were there and he had planned out our itinerary for all the days we were to be there.

First off, we managed to see a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) nestled in a hollow, just outside the guesthouse. After a quick lunch we set off towards Kuntala falls. It was quite a nice drive



Pics courtesy: Rajeev Mathew

White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caeruleus*), Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Great Tit (*Parus major*) and Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*).

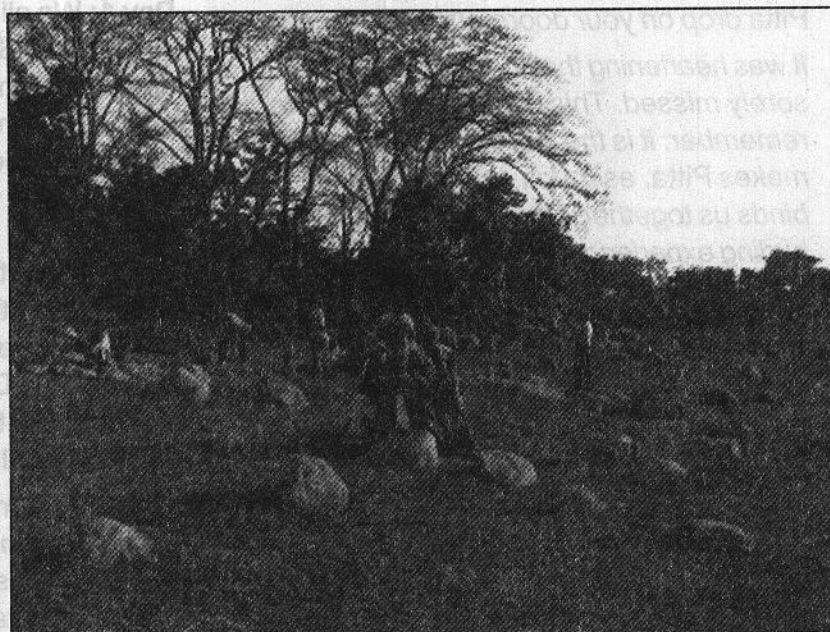
Day 2: We woke up quite early and after a quick cup of tea at a nearby tea stall we were off birding. We turned into a random track, where we were greeted by Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*). The area progressed from farmland to scrub to forests. In the scrubland

The morning after: Camping out by Durgam Cheruvu, outside Nirmal.

and suddenly, someone spotted a bird of prey, perching on a tree. Unfortunately it was against the sun and we could not make out what it was. Luckily, it seemed the bird as was keen to be identified as we were to identify it; maybe it was undergoing an identity crisis. It flew and perched quite close to us, and we were able to look at it with our backs to the sun. It turned out to be a White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*).

The falls themselves were quite beautiful. Right beside the stream, we saw a wagtail down in the valley which, after a great deal of discussion, was pronounced to be a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*). The wagtail, as though displeased with this arbitrary decision on its identity, took off. We had some good birding near the falls: we saw Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*),

we spotted quite a few larks including the Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*). Perched atop a telephone pole was a Changeable Hawk Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*). As the trees grew taller we saw the Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) and a winter visitor, the Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*). Along a dry stream bed, the female of a Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) was also seen.



A late lunch by the lakeside after a wonderful session of birding that included two woodpeckers and four flycatchers.

Post breakfast, we followed Mr Waheed's directions, which took us to a lake in the jungle, an absolutely lovely spot.

We saw Large (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and Small Cormorants (*P. fuscicollis*), Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*),

Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vannellus indicus*), Pintails (*Anas acuta*), Wigeons (*Anas penelope*), Common Teals (*Anas crecca*) and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*). After a brief look

around the lake we went for a walk in the forest. This was extremely rewarding, for we saw a great many woodpeckers flitting to and fro. Both the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*) and the Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*D. maharattensis*) were seen and the Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) as well. We were joined by Mr Waheed, who (as they say in the movies) went on

to make us an offer we could not refuse. When he asked us if we would like to spend the night camped besides the lake. That decision was easily made.

As the forest staff made arrangements for lunch, we went on another walk in the forests where Mr Waheed pointed out a few trees. We then continued along the lakeshore, fighting our way through the scrub. Eventually we came upon a bund from where we could see a lot of activity on this single Arjun tree. And what a huge list of birds it hosted, a veritable Flycatcher Feast! The

haul included the Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) as well as the Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*), and as we retraced the path, a Black-naped Blue Flycatcher (*Hypothymis azurea*). After a delicious lunch by the lakeshore, we headed back to the guest house to collect our bedding. By the time we got back everything was ready for us. It was an amazing experience to be camped out in this amazing setting. After a good midnight walk in the forests we returned to camp for a late dinner, and then to sleep.



Waterfowl census in Nirmal

Census of waterfowl was conducted in two spots in and around Nirmal. The first was at Durgam Cheruvu, a little out of the town, by which the group camped and Kancharod Cheruvu, on the Hyderabad-Nirmal road. Both lakes were particularly interesting for their winter visitors: at the first were seen Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*) (2), Pintail (*Anas acuta*) (12), Wigeon (*Anas Penelope*) (12); at the second were Red-crested Pochard (*Rhodonessa rufina*) (60), Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) (10) and Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) (7) among others.

Day 3: Most of us woke up quite early, and started birding as soon as there was light. Interesting sightings at the lakeside were Stork-billed Kingfishers (*Halcyon capensis*) and Black-bellied Terns (*Sterna acuticauda*). Soon it was time for us to leave, and we returned to the guesthouse, packed our luggage and left. It was a wonderful trip with an awesome haul of a 110 birds.

BSAP would like to extend thanks to Mr Waheed and the department for all that they did for us.

CLIPPINGS

Decline in world's waterbirds

Report from Birdlife International

A new publication reveals continued declines in many waterbird populations across the world. The Wetlands International report, the fourth edition of 'Waterbird Population Estimates', presents estimates and trends of 878 waterbird species spread around the world. Of these 44% of populations for which trend data were available were found to be decreasing or have become extinct since the last edition was released in 2002. The report was based on annual field surveys by 15,000 voluntary expert observers across hundreds of sites worldwide, many of them Important Bird Areas (IBAs). "Due mainly to their importance for large congregations of waterbirds, wetlands make up a high percentage of Important Bird Areas (IBAs). These habitats are crucial for birds and for other species, but significantly, wetlands are important for people, their livelihoods and the economy of their nation," said Dr Lincoln Fishpool, Global IBA Coordinator at BirdLife International.

"The results of this publication highlight clearly how vulnerable waterbirds, and wetlands, are to man-made change."

*Mike Crosby, Research & Data Manager,
BirdLife's Asia Division*

Asia continues to be the continent of most concern; 62% of waterbird populations were found to be decreasing or have become extinct. This is a reflection of the low level of site-protection which sites are afforded in Asia, say BirdLife International. In 2005 a publication by BirdLife International showed that just 11% of key wetland sites in Asia were afforded protection under the Ramsar Convention, a global framework for international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)

Order: Passeriformes;
Family: Corvidae; **Size:**
46-50 cm

Local name: Gokurayi,
Kanda kati gadu (Telugu)

Description: Head, neck and breast are a deep slate-grey colour, sometimes slightly brownish. The back is a tawny-brown to orange-brown in colour with white wing coverts and black primaries. Buffy underparts. The tail is a light bluish-grey with a thick black band at the tip. The bill, legs and feet are black. Sexes alike.

Distribution: Widespread resident, found throughout the subcontinent. Not in Sri Lanka.

Habitat: Dry and moist deciduous biotopes, open wooded country, scrubs, gardens, plantations.

Behaviour: Treepie behaviour is typical of arboreal species: it feeds chiefly on trees and rarely comes to the ground. An omnivore, it feeds on fruits, invertebrates, small reptiles and the eggs and young of birds; reportedly also eats flesh from fresh carcasses. Intelligent like all Corvidae, it is extremely agile, clinging and clambering through the branches. Sometimes travels in small mixed hunting parties with unrelated species such as drongos and babblers; a sociable and a rather noisy bird.

Nesting: Season from February to July. Nest is built in trees and bushes using twigs, rootlets; usually quite shallow. Usually 3-5 eggs laid.

Call: Has a variety of calls, but a *bob-o-link* or a *kokila* call has been heard, as well as a magpie-like alarm call.

Trivia: Being closely related to Magpies, Treepies sometimes exhibit the famous Magpie tendency -- an affinity for bright objects, and a talent for filching them! Probably the reason for its Bangla appellation, *taka chor*.



Pic: Shiva Shankar

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Editors:** Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **E-mail:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com.

Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



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New Series. Volume 4 Number 3. March 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC: Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 18.iii.2007, 6.45 am: Nehru Zoological Park, Mir Alam

The Zoo is a good place for birding and particularly cool and shady in these early summer months. Inside the Lion Safari, we should be able to find ground birds as well as plenty of warblers and flowerpeckers. The lake has a breeding population of Large Cormorants and also Painted Storks. Stone Curlews have been known to breed near the Sambar enclosure. Earlier trips have given us interesting sightings and observations, and this one may throw up a few surprises as well.

This will be a morning trip and members will gather at the main gate. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223).

NEWS AND NOTES

Trip Report: BSAP visit to ICRISAT

By Sharada Annamaraju

An exam in a dreaded subject went well and even the weather was positive and breezy. To add icing to the cake, I returned home to find the familiar brown envelope sticking out from the slot in the mailbox. My joy knew no bounds! After a gap of several months, *Pitta* was back. Angels played their harps and sang gloriously from the heavens above!

February's field trip was scheduled for ICRISAT, Patancheru, a location well known for excellent birding. On February 11, it was still dark when we gathered at ICRISAT's gates. The first sighting was a Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*). A Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) showed up next, sailing over and settling down behind a grassy mound in a field. Once the sun surfaced we set off towards one of the lakes in the campus. It was pretty disappointing to see practically nothing but a small paddle of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) near the opposite bank and a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). A sudden increase in

birding activity brought sightings of Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*), Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) and a Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*). We made our way around the lake and saw a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Grey Hornbills (*Ocyrceros birostris*), and Common Wire-tailed Swallows (*H. smithii*). The undergrowth was alive with the calls of warblers. We refrained from identifying them initially, for they pretty much look the same to the untrained eye! However, a few of us persisted in identifying them and were unfortunately unsuccessful and they continued to haunt us throughout the trip!

We had clear sightings of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*) and a couple of Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*). Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) were



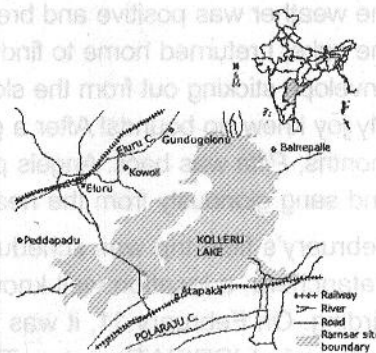
practically everywhere in plentiful numbers! The Patancheru lake bustled with Purple Moorhens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Coots (*Fulica atra*), Pheasant-tailed Jacanas (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), a few herons and egrets. We next saw the Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) and the Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) soaring high above us in the skies. At another lake in the campus we saw a mass of Shovellers (*Anas clypeata*), Comb Ducks (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*), Lesser Whistling Ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and a beautiful Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). Yet another water body yielded a splendid jackpot of species. Here we saw Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*), Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*), Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) and Brahminy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*).

spotted! Suddenly we saw weaverbirds in the distance and were psyched into believing them to be the Black-breasted variety. We tried flushing them out of the undergrowth, but instead of giving a clear view they disappeared and weren't seen again. We returned to the main gate dejected by denial of what could have been a good sighting.

Trip to Kolleru Lake

By JVD Moorty

'Coloir' or 'Kalugu' is a water body about 60 kms from Vijayawada and roughly 35 km from the coast. With water spread area varying from 135 km² to 954 km² at different contours this water body is better known today as Kolleru Lake. This was our destination for birdwatching and the Asian Waterfowl Census. So it was that Shafaatullah, Kulkarni, Nandu, and I drove out on the morning of 26th January at 5.30. Around 8.30 we made our first stop at Nakrekal where the Musi barrage provided a perfect spot for birding and breakfast. A huge flock of Glossy Ibis gave us a fly-past. A lone Pied Kingfisher made two vain attempts at snaring its breakfast – and after wishing it well, and bumping along the



dam(n) road we took a right turn towards the national highway to Vijayawada. The first thing we did when we reached Kaikalur, our base for Kolleru, was to check into Hotel Varsha Residency. After a quick wash and a cup of coffee, we went to have our first glimpse of the lake.

Shafaat's amnesia started disappearing as he slowly started identifying places he had visited earlier, though to be fair, it was a good 10 years ago. At Kometilanka, around 4.30 pm, we were greeted by the sight of a lone Grey Pelican roosting in the palm trees abutting the lake. A walk along the bund had us totting up birds on both sides. Open-billed Storks had had a good year as far as their hatchings were concerned; they seemed to be all over the place! Kullu spotted a bittern landing amongst the reeds, and with no amount of straining through the binoculars could we catch sight of it. At the jetty we were swamped by boatmen who all wanted to show us the birds. Owing to lateness of the hour, and also the fact that the boats appeared to float by faith alone, we decided against taking a boat and birded from a ramshackle bridge that was host to an amazing volume of traffic, both human and mechanical. We swayed every time anyone crossed the bridge. It reminded me of the Bridge on the River Kwai and we could only hope that it wouldn't meet with the same fate as its more famous cousin.

The sighting of the evening was a group of about 120 avocets in the water, apart from terns, egrets, swallows all milling around apparently aimlessly. The Bushnell scope also attracted the locals and Nandu played teacher explaining the intricacies of birding to the very enthusiastic locals. After fixing a boat for the morrow we called it a day. Flocks of Night Herons stitched their way across the falling cloth of night. Black clouds of ibises were coming in to roost, a veritable monsoon of birds! Our appetite whetted, dinner was quickly in and lights out.

Next morning, we were on the boat in the waters of Kolleru by 7.45. Our first destination was the 'tank' area where we had seen the avocets. Naturally they had

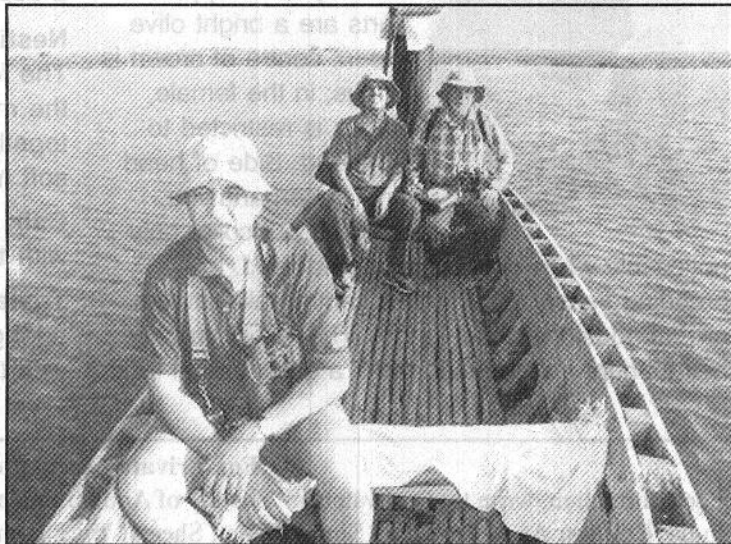
other things to do, but we were greeted by flocks of pintails, shovellers, egrets, ibis, jacanas, grebes and the ubiquitous cormorants.

Black-tailed Godwits were aplenty and so were terns. It was a sight to see Nandu finalizing a business deal from the middle of the lake, while a Painted Snipe showed us its flight pattern, and a lone Bluethroat, blue throat and all, posed for my camera at 5 feet – that really made my day!

28 January took us to Peddavadlagadda. It was a great feeling to drive along a huge expanse of wetland habitat and birds on either side of the road. A Peregrine Falcon wheeled away above, and Shafaat spotted the White-Eyed Buzzard in the branches of a coconut tree. We drove to Gudivakalanka, which is a superb place for birding, a wetland in the true sense of the word. Enraptured as we were with both the habitat and the birds, the road to civilization was dusty and bumpy.

Kolleru is a very important wetland and we must do everything possible to protect it. We saw different kind of fish traps in the water. The locals were also collecting snails from the lake bed to harvest and use them as fish feed. Though the majority of the fish tanks have gone, now that the Government is taking steps to restore Kolleru to its old glory, the birds are yet to make their presence felt; however, what we saw was very heartening and we can only hope that good sense will prevail in the end.

Pic courtesy: Nandakumar



Kullu, Nandu and Moorty get some Kolleru sun.

CLIPPINGS

Centre delays captive breeding of GIB

Report in Deccan Chronicle, 5 February 2007

By U Sudhakar Reddy

Srisailem, Feb 4: Captive breeding of the highly endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has failed to take off because Union officials are sitting on the proposal, officials said. On the other hand conversion of grasslands into agricultural land around the Rollapadu wildlife sanctuary in Kurnool is posing an additional

danger to the GIB. Farmers have taken to raising tobacco crop instead of groundnut, which is also affecting the rare bird. An estimated 35 GIBs have been spotted in the Rollapadu bird sanctuary and its surroundings. The sanctuary is situated 60 km from Kurnool near Nandikotkur.

GIBs share their habitat with Black Buck, but the growing populations of Black Buck has seen the animals run over the nests of the bustards, destroying their eggs. Assistant Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, K Thulsi Rao said, "They come to Rollapadu to breed and move

around neighbouring districts at other times."

"We have sent a proposal and management plan for captive breeding at Rollapadu but there is no decision from the Centre. It is high time that captive breeding begins," Mr Rao said.

Note

If members have undertaken bird counts anywhere in Andhra Pradesh as part of the Asian Waterfowl Count, please send the data lists at the earliest to Siraj Taher at siraj.taher@gmail.com.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)

Order: Passeriformes; **Family:** Sylviidae;
Sub-family: Acrocephalinae; **Size:** 13 cm;
Local name: Darzee (Urdu), *Likka jitta* (Telugu)

Etymology: *Orthotomus sutorius* comes from Greek 'orthotomeo' which means 'to cut straight', and from Latin 'sutorius', 'of a shoemaker'. A nod to the bird's nest: typically, a fold created by sewing together two leaf edges.



Pic: Vijay Cavale

Description: Upper parts are a bright olive green; centre of crown is rufous; in the female, rufous is restricted to forehead. Side of head and underparts are white. Black collar only

noticeable when the bird raises its head. In breeding season, the male's central tail feathers are an additional 3 cm longer. The tail is typically held upright and in motion with a quick lateral flick.

Distribution: Widespread resident, very commonly found – in fact, quite the friendly neighbourhood character!

Habitat: Forest edges, gardens, parks, open country, scrub, mangroves.

Behaviour: Usually solitary or in pairs. It tends to inhabit undergrowth but moves about restlessly in quick dart-like flights. Feeds on insects and insect larvae for the most part, with a supplement of flower nectar berries and fruit.

Nesting: Season is between February and May. The female builds the nest with assistance from the male. Leaves are beautifully stitched together with grass or spider silk, and lined with soft materials. Usually about 3-5 eggs are laid.

Call: A two-syllable phrase (chee-yup) repeated with tremendous persistence.

Trivia: The French call our tailorbird 'couturière à longue queue' which means the 'seamstress with the long tail' - how French!

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Editors:** Aasheesh Pittie, Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **E-mail:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com.

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Field outing

Sunday, 15.iv.2007, 6.45 am: KBR National Park (Main Gate), Jubilee Hills.

KBR National Park, formerly the Chiran Palace grounds, is a 400-acre area, and one of the few remaining spaces with indigenous Deccan flora in the city. We're likely to see plenty of Peafowl, and other members of the pheasant family such as Partridge (both Grey and Painted) and Quail. Sightings of Black-winged Kite and Ashy Woodswallow are possible as well. A pair of Painted Snipe were spotted by the lake on previous visits and they're on the list of probables too.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Mr Siraj Taher (9848272520).

Report: BSAP visit to the Zoo.

By Sarala Mahidhara

At about 6:45 am on Sunday morning, 18 March, Arjun, Sailaja and I joined over a score of birding enthusiasts at the main gate of the Jawaharlal Nehru Zoological Park. I say enthusiasts because many of us (like Sailaja and me) were either first, third or few-timers, happily and eagerly guided by the more experienced members of BSAP. The most delightful aspect was the age-mix: a lot of little ones and youngsters who (you'd think) would've preferred to sleep late and as well as adults. So the convoy of cars made it to the Zoo's Safari, parked there and we went into the enclosure where lions would be allowed to roam free after 9 am. The woods were beautiful and the occasional roar of a lion authenticated and added a little romance to the jungle experience.

The little lake before the Safari entrance was like a welcome drink, refreshingly full of water birds which connected you directly to the business you'd come to do. Binoculars focused on Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Pond

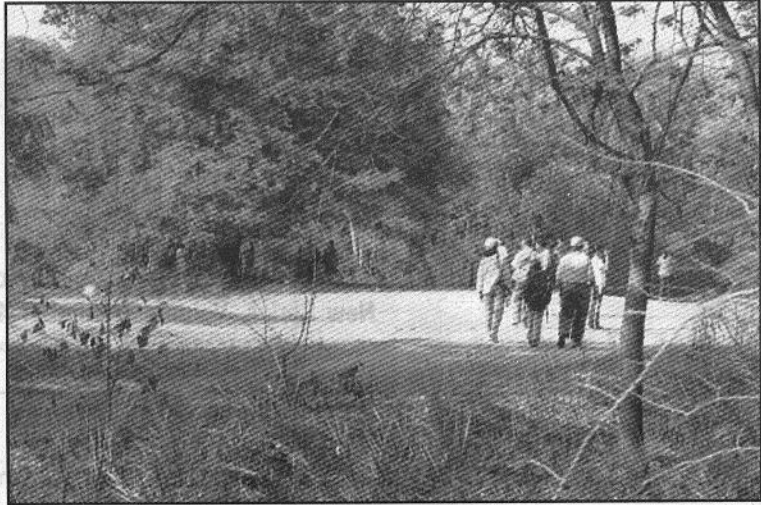
Hérons (*Ardeola grayii*), Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*), a few Purple Moorhens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) and Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*). Our entry into the Safari was heralded by a Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) circling overhead.

The greenery inside the Safari was abundant, although the brush got drier as you went further up to the stony and hilly parts. The cool, shady arbour at the entrance was alive with birds calling. While the more experienced identified Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) calling from the lake beyond, and even saw some, I tried to strain my ears to learn, quite futilely panning the thicket with my binoculars. Some other birds also were heard but not seen.

Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*), Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides*

striatus), Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) kept us enthralled all the way in. Once in a while Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) made their appearance on that rock there or this scrub here or even draped at a distant fence with the peacock's plumage dropped gracefully down. We saw some peacocks make quite a show of themselves, too.

By now the tree cover had practically disappeared, the sun had turned rather hot and the glare a bit obtrusive specially while trying to watch Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) overhead.



Into the lion's den: The birding was good but the walk was glorious.

CLIPPINGS

Bustard numbers falling

AFP / 3 March 2007

India sounded the alarm about a fall in the number of the subcontinent's rarest bird, the Great Indian Bustard, and blamed it on shrinking habitats. "More and more grasslands are being used for cultivation, leaving the birds little space," the environment ministry said in a statement.

"Moreover, due to overgrazing by cattle, there is not enough food to go around for all and gradually the bird's home ceases to exist in the grasslands," the ministry said. It gave no estimate of the number of remaining bustards, which are large ground-dwelling birds with a long necks and long bare legs resembling young ostriches. But environmentalists estimate only about 500 bustards roam wild on the subcontinent, down from hundreds of thousands half a century ago.

A wildlife law had been strengthened to try to save the bird from extinction with stiffer punishments for poachers, the ministry said. "The important habitats of the threatened bird have been declared wildlife sanctuaries and financial assistance is being given to states for its protection," the ministry added.

We saw Brainfever Birds (*Hierococcyx varius*), Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedipnemos*), Tickell's Flowerpeckers (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*) and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*). Then there was this Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) perched on a branch about four feet off the ground, in solitary splendour, its long tail feathers fully visible. It obligingly stayed visible while we watched. It was my first actual sight of a bird I'd only seen painted across boards in sanctuaries. This was easily the highlight of the morning. We turned back, escorted by our gun-toting guide to the exit, for it was time to let the lions out. Apart from the birds, the walk itself had been so picturesque, with some stony ruins thrown in.

Out by the marshy waters once more, it was picnic time. While we sat on the rocks and ate, the flowerpeckers and sunbirds kept flitting overhead and somehow the sandwiches seemed tastier with an eye on the water birds. Compared to the veritable feast of birds at ICRISAT, the Zoo diet was a bit *sattvic* – we counted just about 30 species – but the terrain and experience were different and utterly engaging. As everyone bundled back into their cars, energies still unflagged, youngsters still boisterous, I really got the feeling that there will never be too few people to admire the dizzying number of unique and distinct birds. That was a real comfort. I am waiting for the next outing!

Column: Urban Birding

By The City BirdBrain

An interesting creature made its appearance in the balcony a few days ago. This was a squirrel, the common grey striped squirrel that was so much a feature of old gardens in the good old days before the invention of apartment blocks. I was quite pleased to play host to this chap since I have had more than a fair share of adventures with squirrels in the old days. I remember a particular chap who accompanied me to school several times. He was the bane of many a teacher from his reprehensible habit of popping out of my shirt pocket just in the midst of a critical lesson. And on one memorable occasion he caused mayhem in the chemistry lab! But we are not going to talk about mammals in this column so I will say no more about squirrels. A more appropriate subject to talk about would be the object of the squirrel's visit to the balcony – a fresh visitor to the fruit buffet: the very exquisitely coloured Indian Treepie.

Considering the antics of the treepie at the buffet tray, it struck me that this particular chap had gone many days without a square meal. The first intimation I had of the shape of things to come was a loud and piercing series of angry chatterings from the mynas in the balcony. Hastening thither to ascertain the cause of this anguish, I found that the treepie had swaggered into the circle around the fruit tray and, with word and gesture, was making it abundantly clear to all that he was king and would brook no company while he tucked in and got his. This it unabashedly proceeded to do and what with

having to break off occasionally and, with a bit of fruit hanging out of its beak, chase away a more than usually bold myna; and then rapidly hopping back to continue stuffing itself until yet another bird appeared close enough to warrant it giving chase as before, it was a quite delightfully unruly scene. I simply cannot find it in me to blame the squirrel, knowing their thirst for exact knowledge of the world around them, for wanting to know more about what was going on.

Few unbiased judges would cavil at my giving the Treepie the title of swaggering and bold. They are abundantly that and more. Having once discovered the buffet tray, the individual that first visited it was not slow to spread the message amongst his cronies, with the result that a week after I had had my first visit, I found that I had unwittingly become a sort of focal point for an unruly gang of colourful chaps. While it would be too much to say that I was displeased, I wished that these fellows would not show such vocal displeasure at the other inhabitants of the balcony. Against this had to be set the fact that they had apparently decided that I was a pal and a brother and they rapidly started to suit the action to the words by gathering around me as I sat in my chair and endeavoured to clear my head with a hot cup of tea. One chap decided that the tea was an interesting phenomenon and warranted careful investigation. It carefully hopped all around the mug, peered interestedly inside and tried to eat some of the rising steam. Finding that this burned the mouth, he decided that such things were evidently not suitable for such aristocrats as treepies. Peering up at me as I sat there, he appeared faintly puzzled that I should find so obviously dangerous a beverage enjoyable.

More next time... keep watching the treepies ... Happy Birding!

That's a fact!

Which bird holds the world record for the greatest wingspan?

This would be the Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*). This is a large seabird of the South Polar regions, with an average wingspan of 10.2 ft, occasionally even 12 ft. In non-breeding years, these superb fliers can sometimes fly around the entire world.

(This is part one of a three-part series on the Indian Treepie)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

White-throated Munia (*Lonchura malabarica*)

Order: Passeriformes, **Family:** Estrildidae;

Genus: *Lonchura*; **Size:** 11–12 cm

Etymology: *Lonchura*, from Greek: *lonkhe*, a spear-head; *oura*, the tail; referring to the pointed central tail feathers of munias;

malabarica = of Malabar.

Local name:

Charchara,

Charga,

Charakka

(Hindi), *Jinuwayi*

(Telugu)

Description:

This is a thick billed, plain brown munia with pointed black tail, white upper tail coverts and whitish underparts. The beak is a shiny grey and the eyes are dark brown. Sexes are alike.

Distribution: India and South Asia.

Habitat: Dry, open cultivated as well as sparse scrub-and-bush country. The finch tends to avoid the more humid tracts.

Behaviour: A sociable bird, found in parties or flocks in open scrub country. Quite like other munias when it comes to food, call notes and general behaviour.

Nesting: The nesting season is practically all year, with local variations. The nest is a large globular structure of coarse grasses, lined with softer flowering grass or cotton wool. The munia tends to take over old Baya nests. Eggs laid are usually 4–6 and pure white in colour.

Trivia: Also called the Indian Silverbill, for its glinting grey beak. It is also closely related to the African Silverbill (*Lonchura cantans*).



Pic: Niraj Vijaykumar Mistry

BOOK SHELF

Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent

Author: Rishad Naoroji

Pages: 704

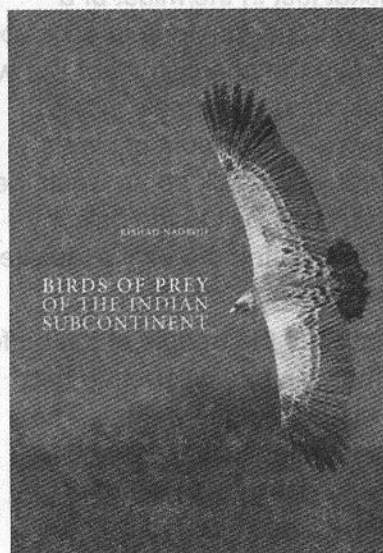
Published by: Christopher Helm

Price: Rs. 1,800

Among recent book releases on birding is a book that is a veritable boon for raptorophiles: a comprehensive one-stop resource on birds of prey. One of the foremost experts on raptors in India, Rishad Naoroji brings out *Birds of Prey of the Indian*

Subcontinent – a culmination of several decades of research and a lifetime of devotion to these birds.

This is a complete reference guide to 69 species of migrant and resident raptors with species accounts, size

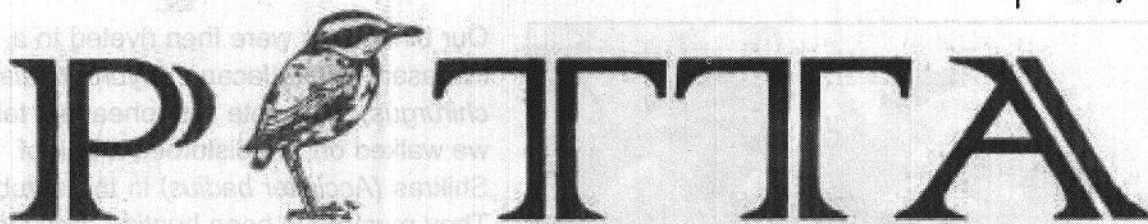


and measurements, nomenclature and etymology, field characters, confusion species, status, distribution and habitat (including a detailed range map), behaviour, food and feeding, voice, and breeding ecology. Each species account includes a series of colour photographs depicting a range of plumages, races and ages. Apart from over 850 photographs, the book also contains sections on biogeographic distribution, raptors in history and mythology, and locating and observing raptors, as well as on conservation, with special stress on the vulture population crisis.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Editors:** Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **E-mail:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com.

Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

New Series. Volume 4 Number 5. May 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 20 May 2007, 6.00 am: Sanjeevaiah Park, Necklace Road.

This park at the heart of the city is a good place for birding just before the monsoons come in; also the shady trees are considerate to birders in these months of enervating heat. Crows nest in the park as well as drongos and Pied Starlings; occasionally chloropsis are also seen. There is every chance of spotting Coppersmiths and orioles, and there are bound to be plenty of warblers. The lakeshore should offer some wading birds such as stilts and moorhens. It might be possible to glimpse some gulls and terns as well.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Mr Siraj Taher (9848272520).

Indoor meeting

Saturday, 26 May 2007, 6.30 pm: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Mr K Thulsi Rao, Deputy Conservator of Forests, AP, will speak on the bio-diversity of the Nagarjuna Sagar–Srisailem Tiger Reserve. [Note: This is a new venue for BSAP. Members uncertain of how to get there can contact Ms Padma of the Association (040-65526443) or Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Mr Siraj Taher (9848272520)].

Report: BSAP visit to KBR Park

By Pratik Gupte

The monthly field outing this month was to KBR Park. It was 15 April; considering we were well into summer, the day was cloudy and good for birding but it was a rather small group that gathered outside the gates – Arjun, Sheetal, Sharada, Shweta, my younger brother Sanket, and I.

A little way into the park, we were greeted as is always the case in KBR by Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*). Also spotted first off were two Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) and a Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*). Quite a few Sunday walkers seemed to take an interest in our bird watching, offering friendly tips and information, pointing us to birds they thought we may have missed.

As we walked on, we saw a little bird that caused debate: a prinia, of course, but which? After some debate and consultation with the books, Franklin's Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) was ruled out in favour of the Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*). We then saw Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) and an Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*). Yonder a flash of yellow drew the eye and caught it: a pair of Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*).

As we moved off the beaten track, we rounded a bend in the trail to see two interesting birds – Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) and

Pic: Sheetal Vyas



Looking up the prinia.

a juvenile Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), which was completely greenish yellow without any red on it. Then we spotted Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) and a Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*). The Plain Prinia put in an appearance again, darting to and fro, perhaps giving us a chance to change our minds over its identity.

We reached the lake, hoping very much to see Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) that were seen here before; there was no sign of them, however. We then sought the shade and rested for breakfast, and some photographs. A Black Kite (*Milvans migrans*) came to rest on a pole nearby and we saw three unidentified raptors circling overhead, high in the sky.

A Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) drew our attention back to the lake by aggressively chasing off a peacock that had gone down to have a drink.

Our binoculars were then riveted to a Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), complete with pheasant tail. As we walked on, we disturbed a pair of Shikras (*Accipiter badius*) in the shrub. They must have been hunting, because one of them had a dead mouse in its beak. They flew across and we didn't see them again. The rest of the walk back to the gate was uneventful barring some more peacocks and a Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*). We were almost at the exit gate when we saw a Shikra nest, with an adult nesting. We walked around, looking at it from various angles, swapping stories of injury caused by aggressive brooding raptors, but the growing heat soon wilted our enthusiasm and we called it a day and headed home.

We didn't see as many birds as we'd expected, but the trip was interesting all the same. Believe it or not, we didn't see the Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), the most standard feature of any water body!

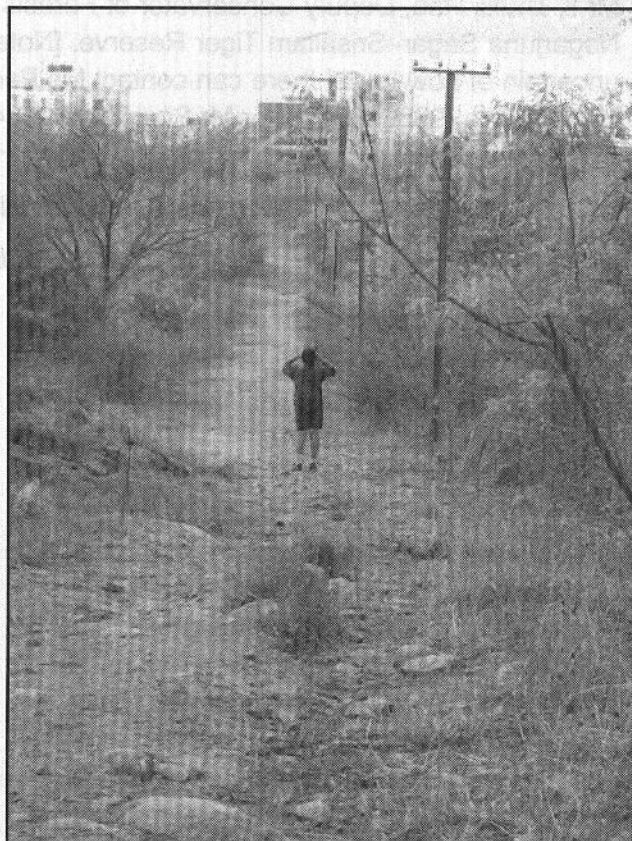
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Pic: Pratik Gupte

Right: A Grey Francolin crosses our path.



Far right: Sanket trudges a solitary trail.



The Treepie Trilogy

Treepies happen to be a great favourite of mine; when they are not creating a racket on the balcony, that is. I find them most interesting creatures and, accoutred as they are in most tasteful plumage, they never fail to give rise to a certain amount of "ooohing" and "aahing" as they flash through the trees. I have sometimes also wondered at their wonderful ability to carry off the clothes they wear with so much aplomb. I am convinced that if I were to don a suit even remotely resembling that of the Treepie, I would look even more revolting than I usually do! Yet the birds carry it off without a tremor and, what is more, seem to enjoy it too. Remarkable chaps!

The birds seem to have adjusted quite well to life in the city. Although the books inform us that these birds are residents of scrub jungle and wooded areas, they are not averse to parks and orchards either. There are considerable numbers of them inhabiting the many parks and gardens in and around the city. At the same time, they are also met

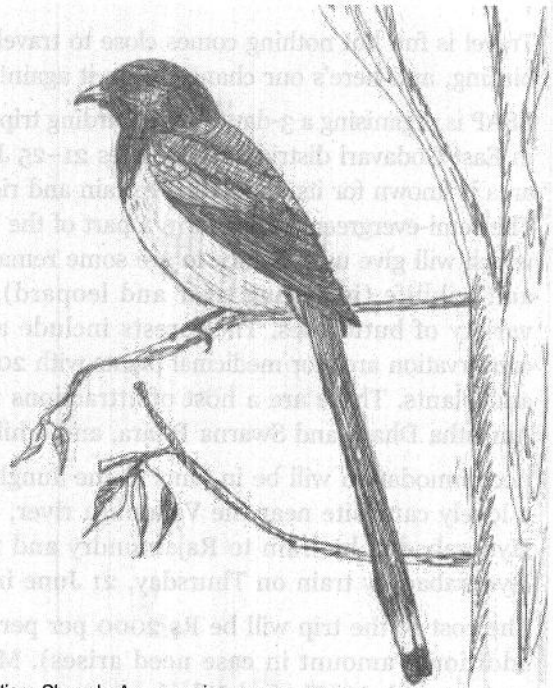


Illustration: Sharada Annamaraju

Urban Birding

By The City BirdBrain

with in the wooded areas that the books refer to. These birds are past masters at the art of turning things to their advantage. A film on tigers showed a kill being feasted on by a pair of Treepies. Given that I myself have only seen them gorging themselves on fruit; it was a shock to learn that they have so carnivorous a palate. Then, a closer look showed that I had wronged the noble fellows. They were only feasting on the grubs and maggots that the unfortunate spotted deer had managed to accumulate in the course of the time he had been lying in the sun, being feasted upon by tiger and flies alike. But returning to their habitat in the city, I have seen them in the larger of the municipal parks, large gardens with fruit-bearing trees and, as in my case, the balcony of a second-floor flat in an apartment block, with a dirty stream behind it, surrounded by high old trees. And though I would not swear to it, I am convinced that at least two out of the six fellows that regularly visit the balcony, have their abode in these same high old trees surrounding the dirty stream.

I have unfortunately not been privileged to see the home life of these birds. Two of the chaps who are at present in the balcony are obviously young fellows and quite obviously the apple of their parents' eyes. One uncouth myna once took it into its head to boss one of the youngsters. The adults immediately showed quite plainly that they considered this a most shocking breach of etiquette. If I may make so bold, I venture to suggest that that myna is flying still...! The knowledge of what Treepies can do with their beaks is not unknown to me. My thick china tea mug bears a scar to this day, testifying to the excellence of the weapon. It is true that the tea mug retaliated to this attack by spilling a considerable portion of its contents on to the tail of its attacker, but this appeared to have no effect other than rousing the passions of the bird still further. It was at this point that the scar first made its appearance!

More on the Treepie, anon!

(This is part two of a three-part series on the Indian Treepie)

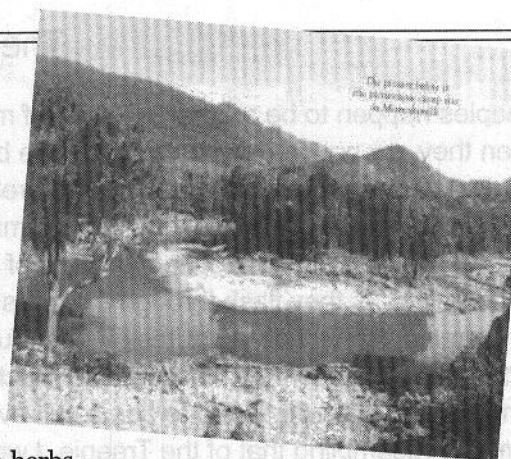
Announcement

Travel is fun but nothing comes close to travel in the cause of birding, and here's our chance to do it again!

BSAP is organising a 3-day/4-night birding trip to Maredumilli in East Godavari district on the dates 21–25 June 2007. The area is known for its undulating terrain and rich biodiversity. The semi-evergreen forests form a part of the Eastern Ghats, which will give us a chance to see some remarkable birdlife and wildlife (including tiger and leopard), as well as a variety of butterflies. The forests include a 260-hectare conservation area for medicinal plants with 203 species of rare herbs and plants. There are a host of attractions in and around the area among which are twin waterfalls Amrutha Dhara and Swarna Dhara, and a hillock called the Vali-Sugreeva Konda.

Accommodation will be in tents at the Jungle star camping site near Maredumilli. This promises to be a lovely campsite near the Valamuru river, surrounded by thick woods and streams. The route from Hyderabad is by train to Rajamundry and from there by road to Maredumilli. The group will leave Hyderabad by train on Thursday, 21 June in the evening and return Monday morning, ie, 25 June.

The cost of the trip will be Rs 2000 per person (**Note:** members may be required to contribute some additional amount in case need arises). Members interested in the trip are requested to pay and register with Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) no later than 25 May.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

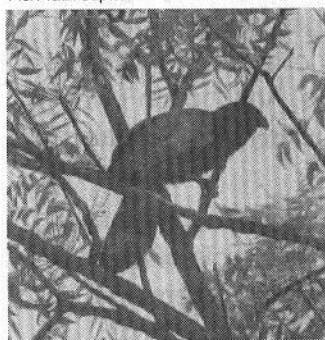
Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)

Order: Cuculiformes; **Family:**

Centropodidae; **Genus:** *Centropus*; **Size:** 48 cm

Local name: *Mahoha* (Hindi), *Chemara Kaki* (Telugu)

Pic: Pratik Gupte



Etymology:

Centropus from Greek: *centro* = centre + *pous* = foot, referring to the long dagger-like hind claw typical of the family, and *sinensis* meaning 'of China': from Latin *sinae* (China) + *ensis* = belonging to.

Description: The head and underparts are a glossy black, with bright chestnut back and wings. The tail is black, broad and long. Black bill with unmistakable red eye.

Distribution: Widespread resident.

Habitat: Wide range of habitats including forests, grasslands, mangroves, scrub, cultivations, marshes, reedbeds and gardens.

Behaviour: This is a fairly bold bird without being what you could call friendly. It feeds on large insects, small vertebrates, snails, fruits and seeds, and is often seen on the ground. It moves between the ground and shrubbery with agility.

Nesting: Season from February to September. Nest is a shabby globular ball of twigs and leaves. Usually 3–4 eggs are laid.

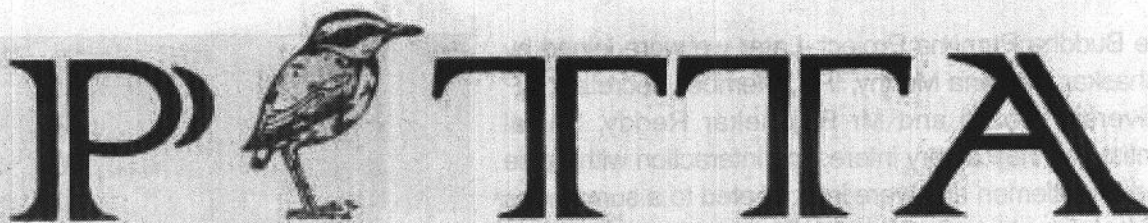
Call: A series of deep-throated booming coop-coop sounds. It also has certain guttural croaks and gurgles in its repertoire.

Trivia: Folklore has it that spotting a Coucal is a good omen and many people take inordinate pains to catch sight of it on an important day. One isn't sure how the Coucal acquired this reputation, but we can be sure it is not for its benign visage!

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New Series. Volume 4 Number 6. June 2007

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Field outing

Sunday, 17 June 2007, 6.00 am: AP Forest Academy, Dulapally.

To reach: En route to Medchal, turn left at Kompalli Crossroads towards Dulapally. APFA is located three km down this road on the left.

This lovely campus at Dulapally is about 24 km from the city. The APFA is one of the centres that host compulsory training courses for the Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers annually. The campus has some varied habitat, and we should be able to see many ground birds and scrubland species; in particular, Francolins, Peafowl, Pied Crested Cuckoo, and Small Green-billed Malkoha.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Mr Siraj Taher (9848272520). Members are requested to carry/wear their membership cards.

Report: Field trip to Sanjeevaiah Park

By Shafaat Ulla

The month of May, with soaring temperatures is no deterrent to our avid birdwatchers. We however make it easier on ourselves by visiting places within the city – and is there a better place than Sanjeevaiah Park on the banks of Hussain Sagar lake? That is where we all gathered at 6:00 am on 20 May.

Birding here is fairly good throughout the year although we miss some migrants. Apart from the usual crows, doves, mynas and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*), we saw quite a few Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*) which probably were nesting. Another interesting aspect was the increase in the population of Asian Pied Starlings (*Sturnus contra*) and at least three pairs were observed busy building their nests on three different trees.

Two species, rather rare for the park, were seen this time. One was the Stone Curlew or the Eurasian Thick-knee (*Burhinus oedecnemus*) spotted just outside the southern boundary of the park. Considering the bird is nocturnal, it was a good sighting. The other was a pair of

Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) but the impressive tail of the male was missing; probably under moult. Anyway, we chalked up a list of about 50 species, including waders.

Our group was joined by Mr N Chandra Mohan Reddy, IFS, Director – Urban Forestry, HUDA, and in charge

Pic: Ashok MS



The skulking Thick-knee.

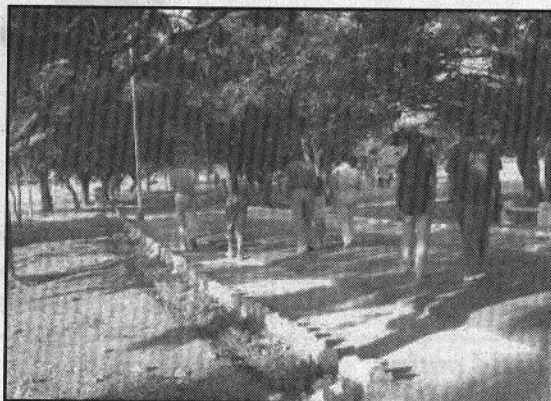
of the Buddha Purnima Project. Later we were joined by Mr Bhaskar Ramana Murthy, IPS, Member Secretary, AP Biodiversity Board and Mr Rajshekar Reddy, Social Scientist. We had a very interesting interaction with these learned gentlemen and were later treated to a sumptuous breakfast, for which we thank Mr Chandra Mohan.

While on this subject and deviating from the subject of birding, I would like to dwell upon the proposed future development of the park about which we had discussions, comfortably seated under a shady peltaforum.

The park is to be converted into an entertainment and recreation ground with an amphi theater, party zone (as if hotels and function halls are not enough), parking lots, childrens' playground, museum, mono-rail, cable car, indoor swimming pool, food courts, and what have you. A detailed map showing the proposed and so-called "developments" was also displayed.

We all protested vehemently and pleaded that the park should remain a "park", open only during day time, with lot of trees, plants and lawns, so that the serene atmosphere can continue to be enjoyed by morning walkers, families and children. In fact, various suggestions were given by us to further improve the park; for instance, increasing the green cover by planting more trees and plants endemic to our region, creating a butterfly park by propagating suitable mother plants, development of a large cactus garden which would be unique to Hyderabad (similar or better than the one at Chandigarh), construction of a "board walk" along the periphery and partially in the lake waters with aquatic reeds on either side, etc.

We all hope that better sense will prevail since there are enough day-night entertainment places dotting the lakeside such as NTR Gardens, Lumbini Park, Eat Street, Rock Garden, Jalavihar and others. We therefore appeal to one and all that the character of Sanjeevaiah Park not be disturbed. It is an excellent lung space for the citizens of Hyderabad who are already suffering from global warming and pollution. We hope the tranquil atmosphere of the park will be maintained instead of creating a concrete monstrosity.



The lovely acres of Sanjeevaiah Park are threatened by a projected amusement park.

Report: International Biodiversity Day

By Ashok Kumar

International Biodiversity Day was celebrated on 22 May 2007 at Indira Priyadarshini Hall, Public Gardens, under the aegis of the AP State Biodiversity Board with the active support and participation of AP Forest Academy, Dulapally. Stalls put up by various environmental societies were star attractions and these included the Worldwide Fund for Nature, AP Chapter; the Forest Department; Deccan Development Society; Butterfly Conservation Society; publishers Oriental Longman; Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology, Hyderabad Office; and the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh. WWF and BSAP also put up their products for sale.

The Chief Guests Padmashree Dr MV Rao, MLC, former Vice-Chancellor of the Acharya NG Ranga

Agricultural University and Norman Borlough awardee; Smt Janaki Kondapi, IAS, Special Chief Secretary; and Mr Thulasi Rao, Asst. Conservator of Forests (Biodiversity) spoke on biodiversity and the need for their conservation.

Mr K Mrutyunjaya Rao, Honorary Wildlife Warden, Guntur, and a member of BSAP, was felicitated for his pioneering work of conservation at Uppalapadu.

The Chairman and the Member Secretary, AP Biodiversity Board, in their address stressed the need and necessity to protect and conserve our biodiversity. The Deccan Development Society which has been rendering yeoman service in the rural sector hosted an ethnic lunch for the guests, adding a rural touch to the event.

The Treepie Trilogy

For so colourful a bird, the Treepie has a singularly unfortunate voice. No doubt, Nature feels it better not to overdo the thing – but it does not appease the unwary lover of nature to observe this bright and flamboyantly coloured bird utter hoarse croaks and cackles that

are most unmusical and also extremely hard on the ears. Having a half-dozen of them vying with each other to see who can produce the loudest noise is something not calculated to arouse pleasure in the heart of the unfortunate balcony owner who has to put up with it. I have sometimes wished that Nature could have seen her way to provide the birds with something more tuneful in the nature of sound boxes. The ones they come equipped with now are not conducive to a restful snooze on the balcony, while the birds are in residence. And the other unfortunate part is that they are so fond of me that even the introduction of a few judicious 'shoos...' has no effect on them and they carry on with their singing as though I just do not exist. It being against my policy to take a stick to my visitors, I have to merely grin and bear it or; more accurately, I have to stuff my ears with cotton and bear it! However, the appearance of the birds somewhat compensates for this unpleasantness. They are some of the more colourful of the balcony visitors and it is not to be wondered at that the squirrel is so interested in making better acquaintance with them.

If you happen to have some fruit trees in your area, then it is probable that you may be receiving visits from the birds. They specialise

in guava and *jamun* trees and I know a single *jamun* tree to be so heavily infested with these birds that I was convinced that it was a sort of amateur club for treepies regardless of age and sex. The unfortunate individual who depends on fruit trees

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for his bread and butter would probably be pardoned for hurling anathemas at the birds. For these individuals, I may say that the Treepie has his enemies in the wild. A favourite prey of the Laggar Falcon and the Red-headed Merlin, I have sometimes seen a treepie also hounded by a shikra. If there is more than one treepie in the area, I am bound to admit that the hawk knows it is beaten, but not so the Merlin, which promptly proceeds to bring up its own mate and so make short work of the first treepie it comes across. And when the Treepie is not being pursued by the winged hunters, it has its hands full coping with the bird-catchers. What possible use these gentry have for the birds I am not sure. They are not edible and though their appearance is pleasing, a treepie screaming in a cage in the house is guaranteed to give residents the mother of all headaches. So there cannot be a great demand for them as cage birds. However, they are so pursued and I have sometimes seen a few in the cages in the bird market. I also remember that they commanded quite a respectable price, so the wily bird-dealer must know that there is a market for them, though what that market is, I regret that I am unable to find out.

If you have an eye for colourful birds (and not unduly sensitive ears), then it is entirely possible that you will think well of the Indian Treepie. He is certainly very colourful and also, given his extraordinary boldness and flamboyance, is a credit to his clan and an interesting chap to have around. So, if you know of one or more, do spend some time taking note of his activities. They are bound to repay close inspection.

(Concluded)

They said...

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill
Of things unknown but longed for still
And his tune is heard on the distant hill for
The caged bird sings of freedom.

-Maya Angelou, *I know why the caged bird sings*

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)

Order: Anseriformes; **Family:** Anatidae;

Genus: *Anas*; **Size:** 60 cm.

Local name: *Garm Pai* or *Gugral* (Hindi).

Etymology: From Greek, *anas* = duck; *poecilo* = variegated, mottled; *rhyncha* = snout, beak, thus naming it 'the duck with the variegated bill'.

Description: This is a large dark brown duck with scaly-patterned light and dark brown plumage. The bill is black with an orange dot on either side at the base and has a distinct yellow tip or spot at the tip, which gives it its name and is visible at great distances. Watch out for the distinct white-bordered green speculum and the bright reddish orange legs. Sexes much alike except the female is slightly lighter.

Distribution: Wide-spread and common throughout tropical and eastern Asia.

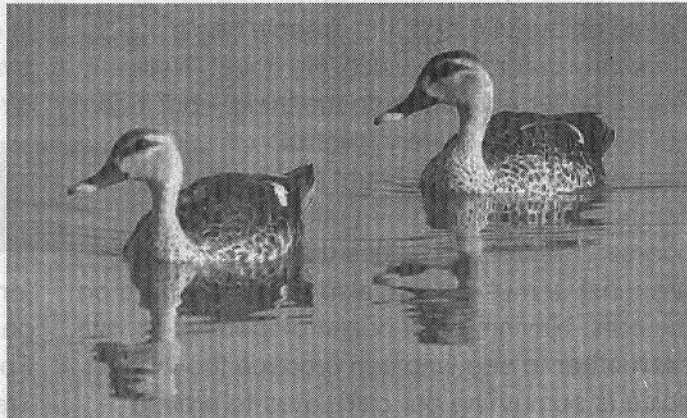
Habitat: Wetlands, freshwater, vegetation covered *jheels* and reservoirs.

Behaviour: A dabbling duck, this one feeds mainly on seeds, grasses and aquatic vegetation which it gets by dabbling or comically up-ending in the water, or by grazing and probing on land. It is quite gregarious outside the breeding season and forms small flocks.

Nesting: Nests mainly in the monsoons; nest is a pad of grass and weeds on the ground in vegetation near water. About 6-14 eggs are laid, greyish or greenish white in colour.

Call: A rather quiet bird on the whole. The drake emits a raspy wheezy keep, while the female gives out a loud quack.

Trivia: With the Comb Duck and the Cotton Teal, it is one of only three Anatidae that are year-round residents in these parts.



Pic: Ashok MS



Pic: SM Jayanth

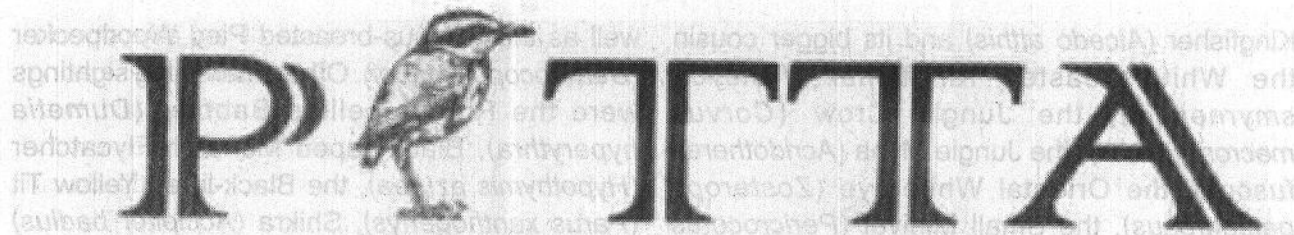
The Harbinger of Rain

Confucius say, watch out for the Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) this month. Heralding the monsoons every year is this fascinating summer migratory bird that arrives in our country usually around the third week of May. It flies in from east Africa along the building monsoon currents across the Arabian Sea. Once here, the chirping bird courts and breeds staying till September-October, when it makes the long flight back. For India, after the harsh summer months, this bird brings with it the magic of bountiful monsoons.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Editors:** Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **E-mail:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com.

Membership (Rs): Admission=100; Annual=200; Student=100 per annum. Life=2,000. Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

New Series. Volume 4 Number 7. July 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 15 July 2007, 6.30 am: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park

To reach: On the Hyderabad - Vijayawada road, via Vanasthalipuram.

Planned and started as a sanctuary for the endangered Black Buck, the park now holds considerable numbers of Chital also. As for birding, there should be several small woodland birds, and if we're lucky we may see ground birds such as partridge, Stone Curlew, and perhaps even a nightjar. The park used to have a nesting Short-toed Eagle, which may yet be seen.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Mr Siraj Taher (9848272520). Members are also requested to carry/wear their membership cards.

Scarlets, Greens and Yellows

Report: Trip to Maredumilli

By JVD Moorty

'Moorty,' said Shafaat laconically, 'I'll tell you what, you people get going.' It was ten minutes to our departure for Rajamundry on the evening of 21 June. Heavy rain, flooded roads and traffic jams had us awaiting, very anxiously, Shafaat, Prakriti, Praveen and Nandu at the station. Not without good reason – Shafaat had all our tickets!! With the train rolling and my hand poised on the emergency chain came the cry, 'They're here!' Thus began our trip to Maredumilli in the Eastern Ghats. The rain also presaged wet times ahead of us. The next day we changed transport at Rajahmundry, and drove 80 kms to Maredumilli, a sleepy village located in the verdant Eastern Ghats. If the drive was scenic, the camp – tents, ranging from one-man to two-family ones – was spectacular. To reach the camp one had to walk down a hilly slope, over shingles and across a low hung bridge traversing a fast-flowing stream. Indeed, the following day, following incessant rain, parts of the bridge were under water making the crossing that much more adventurous.

First stop, first day, however, was the restaurant where we arrived very much famished at 1.00 in the afternoon. Hunger took a back seat as birding started immediately with the sighting of the Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bincincta*) sitting tight in the foliage on the top deck of the trees. A flock of Scarlet Minivets (*Pericrocotus flammeus*) had us spellbound with the scarlet of the males, the yellow of the females flitting about in the green canopy set against the grey sky. A very tasty and sumptuous lunch was followed by more birding. A Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) flit to and fro across the road providing everyone present a good look and put Sanket on par with his brother. By evening we had spotted a Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*), an Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*), a Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus*), Spotted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*), Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*), the Common Blue

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and its bigger cousin the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), the Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), the Jungle Myna (*Acridotheres fuscus*), the Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), the Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), and the Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*). Retiring to camp saw tents being selected. Dinner was brought to the camp and eaten amidst discussions on myriad topics.

Later, after the generator was switched off, fireflies flit around lighting the forest with their *auroras*. An unidentified giant moth had us amazed at its size. The forest had a very interesting and busy nightlife.

The second morning was a wet start and we headed off towards breakfast and birding around the restaurant complex, which offered us a feast for the eyes and the palate. Emerald Doves (*Chalcophaps indica*) by the roadside had us all swivelling our heads to get a sight of them. A Giant Squirrel clambered up a tree-trunk hurriedly, and a Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) was caught unawares and scooted into the undergrowth. A Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*) was then sighted followed by a peck of woodpeckers: the Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker (*Picus chlorolophus*), the Large Yellow-naped Woodpecker (*Picus flavinucha*) as

well as the Fulvous-breasted Pied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos macei*). Other interesting sightings were the Rufous-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*), Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher (*Hypothymis azurea*), the Black-lored Yellow Tit (*Parus xanthogenys*), Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) and a Crested Serpent-Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*). There was a Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*) tapping away on the bark of what we named the bare tree. As we drove towards another village about 10 kms away, we saw House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) – rare sight for us Hyderabad birders. We walked for about an hour totting up the Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) and the Yellow-throated Sparrow (*Petronia xanthocollis*). The sighting of the day was, however, the Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*) which took precedence over Loten's Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia*).

The final day – with the sun playing hide and seek – saw an auspicious start with Ashwini and Ashok spotting a Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus*) close to our camp. The forest behind the camp was a beehive of activity with the Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) calling, accompanied by the trilling notes of the White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*). A one kilometer walk into the forest had us all entertained by bird calls and bird song.

Shefali, Prakriti and Arjun came across two dead snakes – one a pinkish specimen, the other they didn't want to turn over to identify.

After lunch it was pack-up and a drive back to Rajahmundry with the sun on our backs!

Pics: Sheetal Vyas



The camp was a well appointed spot that resounded with forest noises.

Two days of rains swelled the Valamuru stream considerably: Chaudhuri works out his exit strategy.





The Maredumilli group.

A total tally of 60+ birds in spite of the rain wasn't bad after all! It was a tired but satisfied lot of 22 birders who boarded the train that night.

Report: Field trip to Dulapally

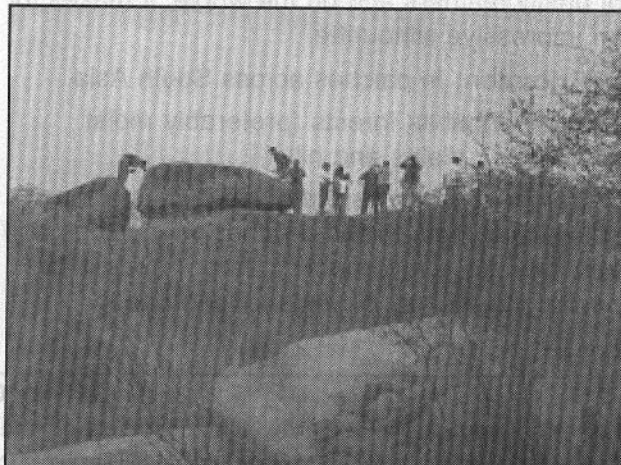
By Ravi Mundoli

Birds of a feather flock together, they say. They also say that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. They (who seem to be extraordinarily garrulous, whoever they are) also say that a change is as good as a feast. All these aphorisms were put in stark relief at BSAP's last outing. The dawn of 17 June found a cavalcade of vehicles heading out from the city to the AP Forest Academy (APFA), Dulapally.

At the gate, more vehicles joined (including one with UN registration). To the casual observer it may have seemed as though some VIP had bestirred herself at the crack of dawn! The fact that the APFA was a first time birding location likely explains why so many faces, old and new, showed up. After months of tramping through familiar territory, the opportunity to blaze new trails was too good to pass up.

Soon, everyone set off to see what delights the APFA had in store. We were joined in our ramble by a number of trainees at the academy, bringing the group size to 50 or so. We plunged into the scrub adjoining the playing fields and kept our eyes peeled for our flighty friends. Birdsong poured in from all points of the compass. Raucous, tuneful, playful, you name it. But nary a bird was to be seen! Perhaps the large size of the group had resulted in the formation of a 'bird free' umbrella around us, for apart from the usual suspects (bulbuls, prinias, babblers, peafowl etc.), the birds came far and few in between. This is not to say that we did not have fun or learn anything

new. Some of us found ladybugs and millipedes we hadn't seen since our childhood, we learnt about the life of the forest ranger from the trainees, we saw a poignant abandoned nest, and we photographed a peacock strutting on a pile of boulders. Thanks to the presence of professional wildlife biologists, some of us clambered over a rock and stuck our noses into the private lives of a number of astonished Rock Agamas (*Agama agama*). By now the large crowd of people had split into smaller groups, each of which ended up wandering off in different directions. Several Ashy Woodswallows (*Artamus fuscus*) graced the electric wires, leading to much joy and excitement. A White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) and a Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) protecting her clutch were icing on the cake. A Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) called, sounding... well... plaintive.



Clambering over rocks at APFA.



The interactive session at APFA.

As we staggered out of the woods, by now all hot and sweaty, we were welcomed into the APFA mess for a tasty breakfast. We then watched a presentation on bird sounds in the meeting room, followed by a round of introductions and interaction, which gave us newbies an idea of the

extraordinary diversity of BSAP. You can take a birder out of the wild, but you can't take the never say die birding attitude out of her. Near the APFA complex, we caught sight of a Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*) skulking in the foliage!

When we left, it was a bunch of sated folk, content at having explored a new birding spot, and quietly pleased at the standing invitation to go back to the APFA any time! For this and other kindnesses large and small, we have a lot to be thankful to the APFA for.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*)

Order: Passeriformes; **Family:** Dicruridae;

Genus: *Dicrurus*; **Size:** 33-36 cm.

Local name: *Bhimraj, Bhangraj* (Hindi); *Tinka passala poligadu* (Telugu).

Etymology: *Dicrurus* from Greek, *dikros* = forked; *kerkos* = the tail; *paradiseus* = of paradise.

Description: With black plumage in iridescent metallic shades of blue, this stunning bird is defined by its extravagant plumes or streamers that end in spatula tipped feathers. These shape into what looks like a racket, thereby supplying the name. The head has a tufted crest of bristly feathers and on the whole, it makes for an impressive silhouette.

Distribution: In patches across South Asia.

Habitat: Inhabits forests (preferably moist deciduous), plains and hills.

Behaviour: Given its pretty looks, it is a touch shocking to note this is a rather pugnacious and fearless bird, even attacking larger birds if its nest is threatened. It tends to lead hunting

parties with treepies and jungle babblers.

Nesting: Nest is cup-shaped and built at fork of tree branches, with typically three or four



Pic: Nerdybirders.com

eggs. These drongos form monogamous pairs, and both sexes share domestic duties.

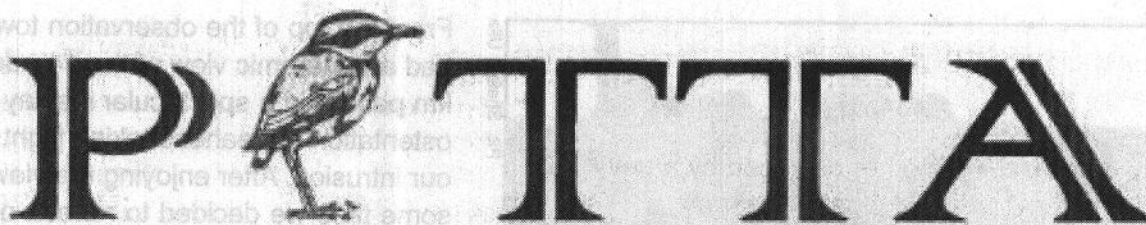
Call: A noisy bird with a wide repertoire of calls, it is also an excellent mimic, leading unsuspecting birders to believe the presence of several species that are not, in fact, around.

Trivia: What is remarkable about the drongo's vocal mimicry is it imitates predators and the alarm/mobbing calls of a variety of birds in appropriate situations, which is not unlike learning short phrases in a foreign language.

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New Series. Volume 4 Number 8. August 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 19 August 2007, 6.30 am: Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur.

The Mrugavani National Park at Chilkur covers about 700 acres. Near Himayat Sagar lake, this is a well wooded area with rocky outcrops that harbours chital and sambar, several small mammals, an interesting array of reptiles as well as several species of birds. Ground birds such as peacocks, partridges and quails are to be expected, and we should be able to line up the usual suspects among the arboreal ones. A watch tower gives us a vantage point over the park, and there is also a small museum with wildlife exhibits.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Shafaat Ulla (9989635223). Members are requested to carry/wear their membership cards.

Indoor meeting

Saturday, 18 August 2007, 5.30 pm: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Aasheesh Pittie, Former Secretary, BSAP, will talk about his recent visit to Kenya. For further information, please contact Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Ms Padma of the Association (040-65526443).

Report: Trip to Vanasthali National Park

By Anita Pillay

The morning of 15 July produced cloudy skies but no real threat of rain. Although many BSAP members chose to stay indoors, it did not dampen the spirits of those of us who turned up at the gates of Vanasthali National Park some 30 kms out of Hyderabad. Birding began with the sighting of a 'gentle flurry' of foraging Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) in breeding plumage in an open patch. A 180 degree turn showed more of them, closer still. It was a good initiation for Neetu, a new member, and after a Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) was observed and commented upon, we set off into the park. The forest department had assigned a 'watcher' to guide us. Inside the park we

spotted blackbuck and chital but all was otherwise quiet, which prompted Shafaat to comment on the lack of birds. Hearing this, a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) came by screaming accusingly, asking each other 'did he do it? did he do it?' and were soon joined by another. After the lapwings finished with the row they had kicked up, little birds – sunbirds, prinias, drongos and others – started to show up. A muster of Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) on its way to a late breakfast and a blackbuck warily shepherding his harem crossed our path and later a brown bird flew by which we decided might have been a Stone Curlew (*Burhinus oedipnemos*). By the side of



Pic: Shafaat Ullia

The small group at the machaan.

the path, we came across open areas with white flowers which were playing host to myriad butterflies, bugs, insects, much to the delight of the entomologists among us, who identified the butterflies as common cabbage, common jezebel and swallow tail.

Rajeev pointed out to us a Small Green-billed Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*) on our way to the park extension, before he decided to try an alternate path around the park. Our walk took us through dry scrub jungle and grass, and we soon started sighting the regular inhabitants: the Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*), Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smymensis*), and the Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). We flushed a pair of Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), which took off in a whirr of flashing wings, and also caught sight of a pair of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) in flight.

Overhead, a few Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) quartered the sky gliding gracefully, looking for carrion at the garbage landfill, and there were a few Asian Palm-Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) soaring in the sky. We could see and smell for quite some time the garbage, that omnipresent monument to modern civilization. Vultures however were 'soarly' missed.

From the top of the observation tower we had a panoramic view of the 14-odd sq km park, and a spectacular display of an ostentation of peahens taking flight from our intrusion. After enjoying the view for some time we decided to retrace our steps. Near a small pond, perched on a tree we saw a juvenile Shikra (*Accipiter badius*). A group of noisy Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) were holding a group discussion in the scrub jungle. We joined up with Rajeev who reported that while he was on his own he had seen a coucal with a chameleon, and a family of Grey

Notice

Dated 01.08.2007

Annual General Meeting for the Year 2006-2007

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Monday, 15 October 2007 at 6.00 pm at Vidyaranya High School, 'Green Gates', opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad. Members are requested to attend the meeting. Please treat this as the official Notice of the AGM.

Agenda

1. Presentation of Annual Report by Honorary Secretary.
2. Presentation of accounts for 2006-2007 by Honorary Treasurer.
3. Appointment of auditors for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 and fixing their remuneration.
4. Election of executive committee members.
5. Any other business, with the permission of the Chair.

Note: Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 2006-2007 are eligible to attend the AGM. Members can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

—Honorary Secretary

Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), five young in tow, racing without stopping till they reached cover. A Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) had kept him company and later still a Gold-fronted Chloropsis (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) had entertained him with 'remix' versions of

mimicked songs. He had also seen Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*), and heard a Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*) calling. After we had seen the Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*), the small nondescript bird whose claim to fame is that it is India's

smallest, we settled under the shade of the trees and shared sandwiches and other eats. The bird list was reviewed before we disbanded for home and a rather late lunch. It was a most enjoyable trip and we had sighted one fourth of the birds that the park is reported to be home to.

The Famous Five

By Arjun Surendra

There is a small grove of five neem trees opposite my house that has been the centre of many a pleasant birding experience. The area where I live, let me explain, is on the outskirts of Hyderabad, and undergoing a transition from being rural farmland to becoming residential land. When first we moved in here two years ago, there were more birds to be seen. Now as construction in and around my colony is in full swing, the numbers and variety of birds has, as a consequence, decreased drastically.

Coming back now to our neem trees... well, not ours, in the strictest sense of the term, but why nit-pick. The first time I noticed bird activity was when I spotted a Shikra carrying the spoils of its hunt into the tree. The copse was again brought to my attention through the hard work and dedication of a Plaintive Cuckoo, which called incessantly but was extremely difficult to spot. Then there was this evening when a huge flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets decided to descend on us, just as the sun was setting. There were more parakeets there than one could shake a stick at (I tried – nothing happened). There were close to 40 parakeets on one tree alone. The air was filled with calls, enjoyed to the fullest by yours truly, and not all that much by the family.

Another interesting sighting happened when I was reversing the car one day. In the rear-view mirror, I thought I got a glimpse of an unusual bird. Borrowing from Tweety Bird: "I thought I

saw a Minivet." I did, I did. It was a male Small Minivet, accompanied by a harem of females. A bird that is not just colourful to look at apparently, but colourful in other senses of the term too. The neem grove seems a rather hospitable place, because other interesting specimens seen there include Spotted Munias and Spotted Owlets that take over as the sun goes down.

Backyard Birding

However the best sighting was the most recent one.

Early one Sunday morning (that would be at 11 am) as I was having a cup of tea and generally lounging about, talking to my father, I heard a strange series of calls. This was one I had never heard before, which is not saying much because as some of you know I am as adept at identifying bird calls as I am at Quantum Electrodynamics. I ran outside with a cup in hand and a newspaper tucked under my arm... to see a flock of four woodpeckers! On closer examination they proved to be the Black-shouldered Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*), two males and two females. I stood watching them from my front door for a full hour, as they flitted from branch to branch.

In the last few months, the trees appear to host only the usual suspects: koels, bulbuls, crows, mynahs and doves, with a few Indian robins and an odd Crow-pheasant here and there for show. With the Pied Crested Cuckoo starting to make 'friendly appearances' again, one hopes that the coming seasons bring more birds.

Some quails!

By Rajeev Mathew

Early June saw my mother besieged by a bevy of 30 farmed Japanese Quails (*Coturnix japonica*) that she bought from the market, saving them from ending up as culinary delights. A cage was hurriedly commissioned to house them. A week later (on 9 June), the watchman brought in a quail found floating in a tub of water, and we thought, naturally, that it was one of our escapees. But a headcount – a most painstaking job since they are all of the same colour – turned up 31 quails! Which brings us to question: what are the Common Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) doing around Hyderabad when they should be raising their young somewhere else to the North?

Could they be stragglers around (Aasheesh Pittie, pers. comm.), or has the migration begun? The only reason I can ascribe to the quails coming down is that the males call lustily in the mornings and evenings – not unlike a Grey



Pic: Rajeev Mathew

Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – though a very liquid 'wet-me-lips'.

Quails, especially Jungle Bush Quail (*Perdica asiatica*) and

Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) along with Common Quail, used to be seen regularly at what is now the Necklace Road around the Hussain Sagar up to the early nineties. Are quail still able to find a peaceful place there? The BSAP birding trip to Sanjeeviah Park in the month of May brought music to my ears in that I heard a Grey Francolin call from some scrub. Is there local movement of birds, and if so what could their flight paths be?

A sighting of a brace of quail has thrown up more questions than answers.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

Order: Passeriformes; **Family:** Pycnonotidae; **Genus:** *Pycnonotus*; **Size:** 20 cm.

Local name: *Lal galya bulbul* or *Pahari bulbul* (Hindi), *Turakapikilipitta* (Telugu).

Etymology: *Pycnonotus* from Greek *puknos* = thick and *noton* = back, and *jocosus* (Latin) = playful, full of jesting.

Description: Black face and head with distinct pointed crest. Red whiskers under eye and above white cheek.

Darkish brown upper body with dark spurs running into light throat and buff underparts. Red vent and long tail with white tips.

Distribution: Widespread resident, found throughout the subcontinent apart from a few arid regions.

Habitat: Gardens, light scrub jungles; prefers denser vegetation than the red-vented bulbul, and also found in hilly regions.

Behaviour: Feeds chiefly on fruit nectar and insects. Often seen in gardens or growth where the scrubs are old enough to have berries. Less fond of human company than its red-vented cousin but pretty garrulous and rowdy all the same.

Nesting: Season is from February to August. The nest is a cup shaped structure of fine roots and grass usually cleverly concealed. Lays 2-4 pinkish eggs. Sexes share duties.

Call: It has a loud sharp call which sounds like 'pick-a-joo', and a song which is more querulous chatter.

Trivia: Unfortunately, the pugnacious nature of bulbuls leads to their use as a fighting bird.



Pic: Shiraz Mehta

For Private Circulation Only

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IP TTTA

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New Series. Volume 4 Number 9. September 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/11/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

Field outing

Sunday, 23 September 2007, 6.30 am: Shamirpet lake.

Some 20 km out of Secunderabad on the Hyderabad-Karimnagar highway, Shamirpet is a lovely man-made lake, and a lucrative spot for birding. This September visit should make sure we see the first winter arrivals among water birds. The large freshwater resource and the surrounding rocky, grassy terrain make this ideal lark country. The Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark is a cinch and Syke's Crested Lark has been seen here as well. Yellow-wattled Lapwings are also likely.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Mr Shafaat Ulla (9989635223).

Report: Trip to Chilkur

By Shefali Moorty

Sunday, 19 August, greeted us with cloud cover and barely any sunshine. Not the best weather for birdwatching... nevertheless, the birdwatchers being birdwatchers set off to Chilkur, for nothing ever dampens their spirits. On reaching the park, we were greeted by a hungry Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) fledgling that was demanding a delayed breakfast.

We moved on and heard White-browed Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus luteolus*); although they didn't appear themselves, Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) did us the courtesy of showing up. They were followed by Small Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) and a couple of Spotted Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and also Little Brown Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*). A Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) made a guest appearance and we notched up the Purple (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*N. zeylonica*) as well as a Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*).

The next sighting was a Small Green-billed Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*). While most of the group watched the malkoha, another part of our group Spotted (pun

intended) Deer sprinting away. The Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*) sat watching us, while we in turn watched an Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) being chased by the bee-eaters. Once the show was over, we ploughed on stopping here and there to look for the owners of the melodious voices, of which we saw only a few.



Breakfast and conversation at the machaan.



Pic: Sheetal Vyas

Humayun meditates by the pond.

A Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and a few Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) flew overhead, and prinias Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) flitted around the area. As we moved on, we saw a Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) sitting atop a tree, and out came the cameras again. A few branches below it was a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and a White-headed Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*). Soon after, we ticked off the Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*) and Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*). As we

trudged along to the *machaan*, we heard the Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*), and Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*). Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) also ensured that they did not go unheard or unseen.

The *machaan* provided us with a lovely view of the green canopy and the surrounding areas. Golconda stood proudly in the distance. There is a lot of ongoing construction around the place, and we could see the Outer Ring Road being built. By next year, we will certainly see the Chilkur Reserve Forest area affected by this development.

Among other highlights of the trip were the feathers (mostly peacock) and porcupine quills we gathered, and a close look we got at a Praying Mantis. Umesh Mani also managed to get 'lost'. Oddly enough, the search party sent to find him managed to get lost as well. Finally, they found the guide, or rather vice versa, and we were all reunited. After a good breakfast, we left the *machaan* and made our way back to the gate, where we saw a Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) that showed off its fine colours before departing. After cups of tea, provided kindly by Aasheesh, we left the park. I am already looking forward to my next birding trip.

CLIPPINGS

Courser's habitat under threat again

This article appeared in The Hindu, 19 August 2007

M Sai Gopal

Hyderabad: The last known habitat of the critically endangered and enigmatic bird of Andhra Pradesh—Jerdon's Courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*)—could once again come under threat. The bird is not found anywhere else in the world.

The Irrigation Department's latest realignment plans of the Telugu Ganga Canal project, has the potential to wipe away 89 hectares of shrub jungle, typical habitat of the

bird, near the sites where the bird was spotted in the recent years at Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary, Kadapa, a recent report from Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) says.

The proposed realignment plans for the canal, if implemented, would cut across the scrub jungle habitat, says the report. "The realignment is precariously close to the boundary of the Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary, Kadapa, as well as the sites where the Courser's presence was recorded regularly between 2000-06," the report says.

The report goes on to add that "canal alignment has to be shifted so that it would border the scrub jungle habitat without actually changing the length of the canal, which is 2.2 km. The canal alignment may be shifted so that the only place of this bird can be saved for posterity."

"The new alignment being pushed by the Irrigation Department, during the course of our negotiations, would further risk the habitat of the Courser. We have already given an alternative proposal of alignment and we feel that our proposal would protect the bird's habitat. If the

matter is not solved, then we will have to submit our report directly to Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of Supreme Court," S Ashok Kumar, who is holding talks with the Irrigation Department on behalf of the BNHS in Andhra Pradesh, told *The Hindu*.

Thanks to the intervention of the CEC earlier this year, the

Department had agreed to re-route the canal, to protect the last known habitat of this bird, the numbers of which hover between 20 and 80. The CEC had directed the stakeholders, including the BNHS, wildlife officials and the Irrigation Department, to chalk out a 'via media' to save the bird and its habitat.

"It is sad that we have to fight so much to conserve this rare bird which should be considered the 'Pride of Andhra Pradesh'. However, I am sure, if all the stakeholders sit together once again to discuss, we can save this beautiful bird," says BNHS researcher P Jeganathan.

Indoor Meeting: Report

By Sheetal Vyas

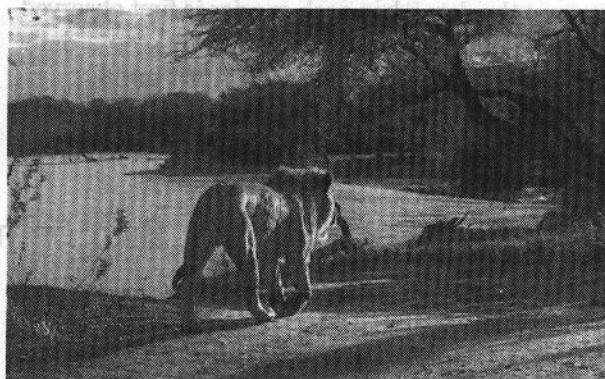
Africa was the focus of this month's indoor meeting at the Association of German Culture on 18 August. Aasheesh Pittie and young Pratik Gupte had both had the good fortune to recently visit that Mecca of wildlife, Kenya. Their accounts and their pictures made for a very interesting and instructive evening. Kenya has over 1000 bird species and the open African landscape is breathtaking even when constrained by camera lens. The talk, accompanied by a visual presentation, gave us a fascinating glimpse into the wildlife in the parks of Masai Mara, Nakuru and Samburu. Aasheesh laced his narrative with doses of humour as he shared his experiences and his photographs were no less effective for having been captured with an aim-and-shoot camera. Prateek's pictures were also excellent.

It was a well rounded lecture: Aasheesh began with practical details of flights and vaccinations you need to visit Kenya and took us through his experiences with traffic and almost-missed connecting flights. Tourism in Kenya, we were happy to learn, supports a wide range of budgets, from shoestring to luxury. A couple of map-slides put the geography in context, a brief description of the weather and culture filled in the colour and the safari began in earnest. Lions, giraffes, leopards with kill, zebras, a trio of cheetahs, oryx and wildebeest were interspersed with African birds of the most vivid hues, including a pink sea of over a million flamingos at Lake Nakuru. The wildlife-supporting lakes in Kenya occur in the Rift Valley, a geological fissure that is about 6000 km long and around 60 km wide. One of the longest rifts in the world, this cuts a swathe through Eastern Africa, starting in Lebanon, running through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Malawi and ending in Mozambique.



Even more astounding than the variety of wildlife was the fact that these animals were not in the slightest bit shy. To us in India, who're used to stalking birds and game with the stealthiest of treads, and then being content with fleeting glimpses, it was a revelation to know that birds and animals allowed themselves to be approached and photographed from distances of a few feet.

At the end, the speakers took a few questions and that rounded off a happy evening of armchair travel.



Pic: Aasheesh Pittie

MigrantWatch

Journal *Indian Birds* and the National Centre for Biological Sciences together have launched MigrantWatch, an annual countrywide programme to study the movements of common winter migrants to India. The programme is inviting birders to join in and keep an eye out for nine species: Marsh Harrier, Black Redstart, Wood Sandpiper, Northern Shoveler, Grey Wagtail, Brown Shrike, Rosy Starling, Greenish Warbler and Common Swallow.

Volunteers are required to note the arrival and presence these species from home or work, not locations they visit occasionally. There are also two levels of participation to choose from: one, to note and report the date when each species is first observed in the second half of 2007; and two, to keep a daily record from 6 August 2007 to 30 April 2008.

The programme will help construct countrywide maps of first arrival dates, regular presence dates,

and dates of return migration for each species.

The information gathered will be used to investigate the timing and speed of migration; and whether migration times are changing from year to year.

Grey Wagtail



Pic: Shiraz Mehta

Details are available at: <http://www.ncbs.res.in/citsci/>. Birders wanting to sign up can write to Suhel Quader at: MigrantWatch@ncbs.res.in.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)

Order: Coraciiformes; **Family:** Cerylidae;
Genus: *Ceryle*; **Size:** 31 cm.

Local name: *Koryala*, *Kilkila* (Hindi).

Etymology: *Ceryle*, the Greek name for kingfisher is from Gr. *kerylos* meaning seabird. It defines the genus and refers to the coastal areas where the bird must have been first encountered by ornithologists; *rudis* from Latin = sword, referring to its dagger-like bill.

Description: This is a dazzling, speckled pied bird with the distinctive stout, long, dagger-shaped beak.

Distribution: Throughout the plains of the Indian sub-continent.

Habitat: Commonly found around jheels, tanks and creeks.

Behaviour: Watching the Pied Kingfisher in fishing action is a visual treat for any bird watcher. It has an astounding

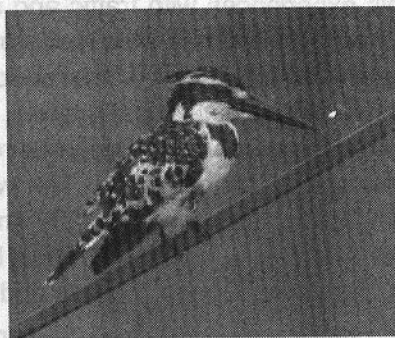
ability to hover at exactly the same place above the waters surface as it scans the water for prey. Once spotted, the prey is quickly dived upon. It rests on a convenient low bough or a preferred rock during breaks or for a leisurely meal.

Nesting: Season from October to May. They have been known to roost together in colonies and they sometimes breed cooperatively. Holes in rock surfaces are used for nesting or horizontal furrows are dug out to accommodate 5-6 eggs.

Call: The call is a sharp, merry *chiruk chiruk*.

Trivia: The Pied Kingfisher has the unique distinction of being able to fish in both fresh and salt water, which makes it the world's only pelagic kingfisher. This ability to fish at sea or in large water bodies is possible because of its knack of eating small prey

in air, without the need to return to a perch and to hunt more than one fish in one session. One talented bird, this.



NerdyBirders.com

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Editors:** Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **E-mail:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com.

Membership (Rs): Admission: 100; Annual: 200; Student: 100 per annum. Life: 2,000. Add Rs 25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series. Volume 4 Number 10. October 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

AGM 2006-2007

Monday, 15 October 2007, 6.00 pm: Vidyaranya High School, opp. Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

BSAP's Annual General Meeting for 2006-2007 will take place this month. The Agenda includes presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts, and election of Executive Committee members. Members are requested to attend the meeting.

Field outing

Sunday, 7 October 2007, 6.30 am: Narsapur Forest Reserve.

The Narsapur Forest Reserve, some 60 km out of Hyderabad on the road to Medak, is a tropical dry deciduous forest area. The fairly dense forest is spread over 40 sq km and is an excellent refuge for several woodland birds. Woodpeckers and flycatchers are likely; the Grey-headed Flycatcher was spotted here last winter. We should also encounter the White-bellied Drongo. A nearby lake might yield some migrant water birds.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Arjun Surendra (9849676573).

Sunday, 28 October 2007, 6.00 am: Zaheerabad.

The second outing this month is to the Mahindra & Mahindra factory at Zaheerabad, about 100 kms from Hyderabad on the Mumbai highway. The factory is situated about one km after Zaheerabad, and about two hours' drive from the city. After spending the morning there, we will also cover some interesting birding spots on the way back.

This will be an all-day trip. Members bringing cars and those in need of lifts may register with Shafaat Ulla (9989635223). Members will need to contribute Rs 150/- per head to share expenses. Cars will leave from Punjagutta at 6:00 am sharp.

Indoor meeting

Saturday, 27 August 2007, 5.30 pm: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Ashok MS will give a talk titled *Birds through a lens – An introduction to bird photography*. An earnest birder and photographer, Ashok runs the photography website NerdyBirders.com. The session will include a slideshow, and Ashok will talk of the basics of bird photography and his experiences in visiting places to shoot specific birds, which will be followed by a Q&A session.

For further information, please contact Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Padma of the Association (040-65526443).

Report: Trip to Uma Maheshwar Temple, Achampet

By Sharad Murdeshwar

The Nallamalai forest range is well known for its rich bio-diversity and when BSAP announced a birding trip to Uma Maheshwar temple, close to Achampet, I was very eager to make the visit.

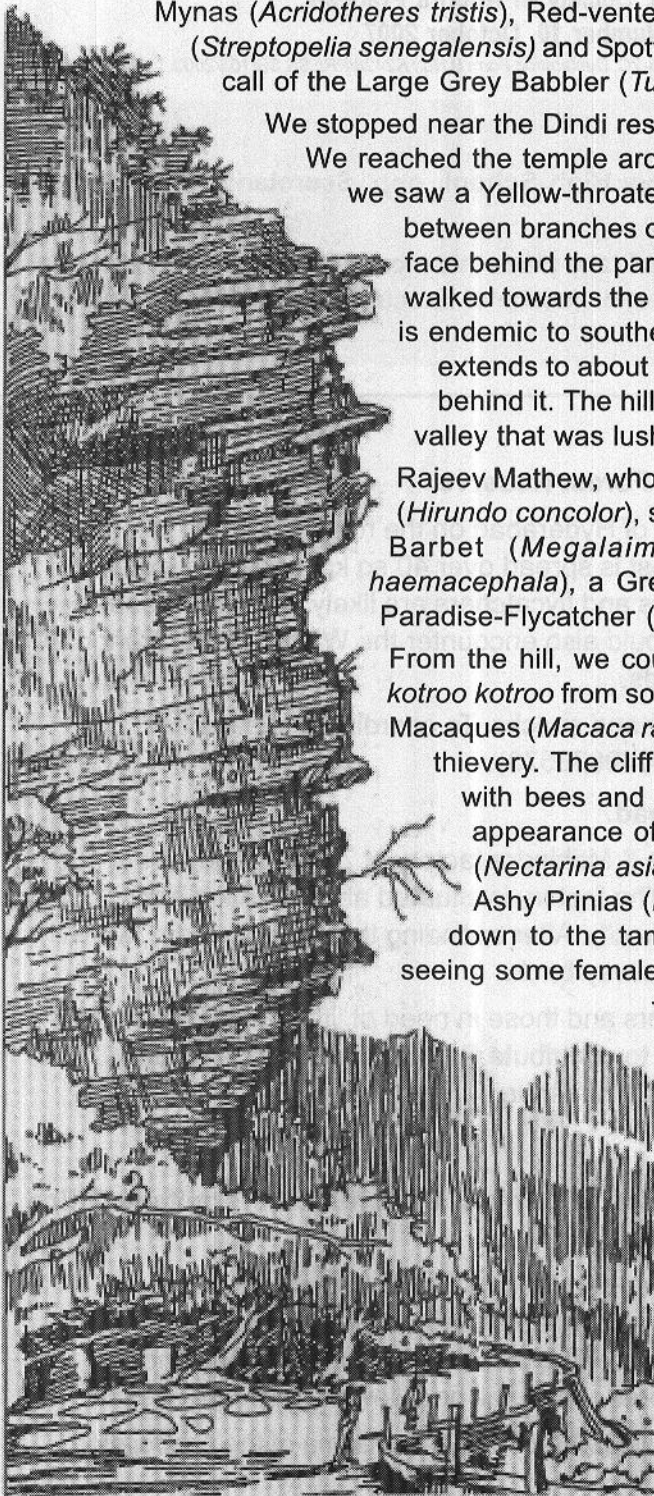
On Sunday, 9 September, we gathered at Panjagutta crossroads, the light-hearted banter among members promising a fun-filled day! Our 'convoy' was soon in the countryside. We saw Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Little Brown Doves (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) and Spotted Doves (*S. chinensis*). We also heard the distinct call of the Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*) on the way.

We stopped near the Dindi reservoir to check the birdlife and were disappointed. We reached the temple around 9.30 am and almost as soon as we alighted, we saw a Yellow-throated Bulbul (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus*) that hopped between branches of a tree, moving to rootlets that grew down the cliff face behind the parking area. It accompanied us along the cliff as we walked towards the temple. It was quite a thrill to see this rare bird that is endemic to southern India. The temple area is on a wide ledge that extends to about three-fourths of a kilometer on the hill, with the cliff behind it. The hill forms a wide, natural amphitheatre with a shallow valley that was lush with vegetation and trees.

Rajeev Mathew, who had reached earlier, reported a Dusky Crag Martin (*Hirundo concolor*), some House Swifts (*Apus affinis*), a Brown-headed Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*), a Coppersmith Barbet (*M. haemacephala*), a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), and a male Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) in the white morph!

From the hill, we could hear the Brown-headed Barbet's monotonous *kotroo kotroo* from somewhere below but could not locate it. The Bonnet Macaques (*Macaca radiata*) were everywhere, troubling visitors with their thievery. The cliff recesses housed many bee hives, some packed with bees and others empty, their cream colour giving them the appearance of bleached lumps of bone. Some Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarina asiatica*), Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*N. zeylonica*) and Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*) were seen. Later we decided to go down to the tank at the foot of the hill where Kulkarni reported seeing some female Asian Paradise-Flycatchers.

The group walking down saw a White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and a Loten's Sunbird (*Nectarinia lotenia*). By the time we gathered, the Paradise-Flycatchers had gone, but we were lucky to see a beautiful Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*) on a wire, its finely streaked underparts and rufous-orange neck patches clearly noticeable. Later we saw two individuals



The jagged rock-face at Uma Maheshwar. This lovely illustration by Sachin Jaltare was first used in Pitta, January 1999, accompanying a report of BSAP's trip to Achampet.

hawking insects. A female Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) circled overhead and as she approached our way, she suddenly dive-bombed in a magnificent display of her prowess and was lost in the foliage of a big tree nearby! However, her quarry appeared to have escaped, for she was seen a little later, off in search of other prey, scattering some Blue Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) as she flew. Another raptor – possibly a male Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*) – appeared high against the light, glided over the hilltop and disappeared from view. A male Plum-Headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) flew, the white-tipped blue-green tail clearly visible in flight. It alighted close to a White-bellied Drongo. A Red-vented Bulbul was spotted next, on its nest on a Honey Mesquite or *Vilayati Babul* tree (*Prosopis juliflora*) close to the road.

Lunch was followed by an interesting discussion led by Rajeev on etymology of Latin names for flora



An Avian Star!

The Yellow-throated Bulbul (*Pycnonotus xantholaemus*) is a rare species of bulbul, endemic to southern India, and seen only in rocky, scrub covered hills of the four southern states. Categorised as 'vulnerable' by the Red Data Book, this bird has a declining, severely fragmented population, owing to destruction and degradation of its habitat. In a pleasing chain of continuity, it was seen on BSAP's previous visit to Uma Maheshwar, reaffirming the grove's place as a faunal as well as floral biodiversity hotspot.



© Gautham

and fauna. Among birds heard were Greenish Leaf-Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) and Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*). Also notched up were the Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Common Iora (*Aegithinia tiphia*), a Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and a Jerdon's Chloropsis (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*) later. After some lazing around, the group headed back to the city. We stopped at a turn on the road to have a good look at the plateau below and saw a pair of Indian Silverbills (*Lonchura malabarica*) chasing each other. On our way, we saw a male

Pied Bush Chat (*Saxicola caprata*) on a wire and heard the Large Grey Babbler calling. At our 'pit stop', some House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) came down for tid-bits and some House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) were seen on their nests on a tree.

We reached the city at sundown and were caught in a traffic jam following heavy downpour. As we neared Panjagutta, we heard about the flyover collapse. It was a terrible end to what would have otherwise been a wonderful day!

Left above: The temple affords a fine vantage point over the landscape; Left: Everyone says cheese.

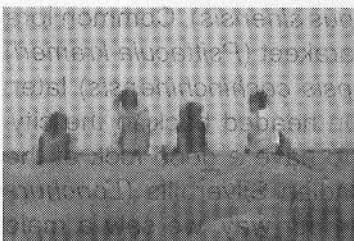
Report: Trip to Shamirpet

By Sheetal Vyas

Shamirpet on the morning of Sunday, 23 September, was swathed in cloud, the air damp and cool. Parking in a squelchy clearing, our motley group of about 20 persons unfurled itself from cars, extracting cameras, tripods and binoculars. Not a moment too soon, for welcoming us to a fresh new day of birding was a Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*), hovering low amidst bush and barbed wire. In the same stretch of green, exclamations pointed to a Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*) and a Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) both newly come down for the winter. The excitement of such sightings had barely died down when a mystery bird wearing yellow-green colours flew past, 'looking like a bulbul, flying like a bulbul, but somehow not' as Rajeev Mathew put it.

It augured well. We walked on towards the lake and soon we had notched up the usual suspects, the Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Spotted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), White-throated Munia (*Lonchura malabarica*), Sunbirds—both Purple (*Nectarinia asiatica*) and Purple-rumped (*N. zeylonica*)—as well as a Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) and a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

As we approached the water, we saw a Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*), delicately treading its way along the rim of the bank as Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) stood pensively on the rocks yonder. Asian Palm-



The children have a quiet moment by the lake.



For a lark: Birders follow every move of the *Alaudidae*.

Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) swooped around and we were soon picking off swallows—the Red-rumped (*Hirundo daurica*), the Common (*H. rustica*) and the Wire-tailed (*H. smithii*)—which put in repeated appearances, allowing us to compare colour, shape and flight.

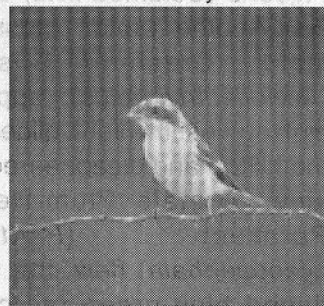
The grassy, rocky terrain around Shamirpet is famous for its larks and quite lived up to its promise; we counted no fewer than five species: Syke's Crested Lark (*Galerida deva*), Singing Bush-Lark (*Mirafra cantillans*), Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark (*Ammonops phoenicurus*), Bengal Bush-Lark (*M. assamica*) and the Ashy-

crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*), watching them dart, swoop, display, ground, putter and sing.

Complicating activity on the ground were two kinds of pipits, Richard's Pipit (*Anthus richardi*) and Paddyfield Pipit (*A. rufulus*).

Across the water on the other bank, there arrived a considerable flock of nearly 40 Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) touching down to join Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*). As we settled down on the rocks for breakfast, Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) played hide and seek in the water while a Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) fished overhead, and triumphantly bore away spoils from the hunt. Spot-billed ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) flew past and to our delight, in a tight formation of six, Garganeys (*A. querquedula*)! We next trained our binoculars closer, to a bush where a pair of Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) came to sit.

As we started to go back, specks in the sky indicated Birds of Prey. An eagle it was, being shadowed by a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*). Pressed as we were to give it a name, the Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) was rejected in favour of Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*). We walked back to our cars hoping for another glimpse of the yellowish bird that eluded identity earlier, but found only rowdy Common Tailorbirds (*Orthotomus sutorius*) and noisy Red-vented Buleuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*). Still that was a tally of about 40 birds and a good morning's work.



Brown Shrike

Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh: Financial Details

Balance Sheet as on 31.03.2007

Liabilities	31.03.2007	31.03.2006	Assets	31.03.2007	31.03.2006
Capital Fund			Fixed Assets		
Opening Balance	408,217.83	391,278.57	Binoculars	4.00	4.00
Add: Life Membership Fees	2000.00	16,000.00	Furniture	10,090.00	11,211.00
Add: Surplus/(Deficit)	(11,895.85)	939.26	Slide projector	1.00	1.00
	<u>398,321.98</u>	<u>408,217.83</u>	Telescope	1.00	1.00
			Tripod	1.00	1.00
			Deposits		
			Canara Bank - FD	175,000.00	175,000.00
			HDFC - FD	69,841.43	69,841.43
			Rent deposit		
			- S Krishnamurthy	1,500.00	1,500.00
			Current Assets		
			Cash in hand	8,641.47	8,591.47
			Canara Bank	92,828.92	106,002.92
			HDFC Bank	16,169.16	11,820.01
			IT Refund-AY 2002-2003	4,054.00	4,054.00
			Closing Stock		
			T shirts	17,440.00	17,440.00
			Caps	2,750.00	2,750.00
				<u>398,321.98</u>	<u>408,217.83</u>

Receipts and Payments (period 01.04.2006 to 31.03.2007)

Receipts	Amount	Payments	Amount
Opening Balance		Advertisement	1,800.00
Cash in hand	8,591.47	Bank charges	5.00
Canara Bank	106,002.92	Internet charges	351.00
HDFC Bank	11,820.01	Office rent	1,500.00
Admission and membership fees	21,600.00	Pitta - Newsletter printing charges	14,250.00
Donations	1,950.00	Postage and Telegraph	2,433.00
FD interest	4,002.80	Printing and stationery	11,597.00
SB interest	3,559.35	Staff welfare	4,575.00
Life membership fees	2,000.00	Stipend charges	4,800.00
	<u>159,526.55</u>	Xerox	576.00
		Closing Balance	
		Cash in hand	8,641.47
		Canara Bank	92,828.92
		HDFC Bank	16,169.16
			<u>159,526.55</u>

Income and Expenditure (period 01.04.2006 to 31.03.2007)

Expenditure	31.03.2007	31.03.2006	Income	31.03.2007	31.03.2006
Opening stock -			Admission and		
T shirts	17,440.00	17,440.00	membership fees	21,600.00	10,475.00
Opening stock - Caps	2,750.00	2,750.00	Project receipts	-	12,000.00
Advertisement	1,800.00	1,800.00	SB interest	3,559.35	2,341.00
Bank charges	5.00	283.40	FD interest	4,002.80	8,856.95
Loss on sale of			Dividend - mutual fund	-	1,410.98
mutual fund	-	2,255.27	Interest on IT refund	-	60.00
Depreciation	1,121.00	1,245.00	Donations	1,950.00	18,525.00
General expenses	4,575.00	382.00			
Internet charges	351.00	1,649.00	Closing Stock		
Stipend charges	4,800.00	4,800.00	T shirts	17,440.00	17,440.00
Office rent	1,500.00	11,000.00	Caps	2,750.00	2,750.00
Pitta - Newsletter printing	14,250.00	-		51,302.15	73,858.93
Postage and telegraph	2,433.00	17,344.00			
Printing and stationery	11,597.00	11,590.00			
Xerox charges	576.00	381.00			
Surplus/(Deficit)	(11,895.85)	939.26	Sd.		
	51,302.15	73,858.93	Siraj Taher	Sushil Kapadia	
			President	Hon. Treasurer	

BIRD OF THE MONTH**Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)**

Order: Falconiformes; **Family:** Accipitridae; **Genus:** *Milvus*; **Size:** 60 cm.

Etymology: *Milvus*, Latin name for Kite from *mollis* = soft, effeminate ascribed to the bird's preying on small targets such as domestic birds; *migrans*, from Latin *migrare* = to move from one place to another.

Local name: *Cheel* (Hindi), *Malla gadda* (Telugu).

Description: Large, almost uniformly dark brown bird of prey, distinguished chiefly by its forked tail, which is very visible in flight.

Distribution: Our own sub-continent resident, the Pariah Kite (*Milvus migrans govinda*) is very widespread and can be found in most urban places and is especially suited to living in crowded human-infested areas.

Behaviour: Extremely graceful glider and moves with beautiful ease across urban hurdles such as wires and concrete structures. Food is diverse and adaptable and includes offal, lizards, mice and young or weak birds.

Nesting: Again, uses the human habitat to advantage, employing the roof of buildings and water tanks or large trees to build its platform-shaped nest of 'found objects'. 2-4 eggs are laid, sexes share domestic duties.

Call: A shrill musical eww-wir-wir-wir.

Trivia: If the Black Kite has an arch enemy, it is the crow. This rivalry could be attributed to the fact that they are competitors for the city's scavenging bounty. The kites have a hard time defending their nests from meddlesome crows as well as escaping crow 'mobbings'.



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Editors: Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **Pitta email:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com. To contact the Society, **write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Society membership (Rs):** Admission: 100; Annual: 200; Student: 100 per annum. Life: 2,000. Add Rs 25/- for outstation cheques.



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New Series. Volume 4 Number 11. November 2007

RNI: Title Verification Letter No.: APENGO2542/01/1/2003-TC. Declaration Form B No.: K2428/PRESS.SB/103/2003.

HSBC Hyderabad BirdRace

Sunday, 2 December 2007, 5.30 am: Hyderabad Public School Gates

After the success of this event last year, the HSBC BirdRace comes to Hyderabad again! The concept is simple: to form teams of four to five persons and see as many bird species as possible in twelve hours between dawn and dusk. Last year's turnout was heartening and this year promises to be even better. Details will be mailed to members but in the meantime, do clear 2 December of all other engagements.

Website <http://www.indiabirdraces.com/> has information on the concept and rules and Sushil Kapadia (9393319333) may be contacted for anything else.

Field outing

Sunday, 18 November 2007, 6.30 am: AP Police Academy.

The AP Police Academy is located on Vikarabad Road, a kilometre short of the Chilkur Deer Park. The visit is in response to a kind invitation to BSAP extended by Dr CN Gopinatha Reddy, Addl. DGP & Director. The group will gather at Punjagutta at 6.00 sharp, but those who want to reach the campus directly can do so as well.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To confirm participation, please call Siraj Taher (9848272520) or Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) latest by 10 November.

Camp

13-16 December 2007: Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary, Tirupati.

An exciting trip to Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary is in the offing in December. The birding camp will be at Mamandur, about 20 kms from Tirupati, on the dates 13-16 December 2007, which translates into almost three days of trekking and birding. Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary around the Tirupati hills, with its pristine and thick forests, supports a wide variety of flora and fauna and is also a trekkers' paradise.

Cost of the trip will be Rs 1800 per person and members may register with Shafaat Ulla (9989635223/23353098) no later than Friday 16 November 2007, so that travel arrangements may be made.

Indoor meeting

Friday, 16 November 2007, 6.00 pm: Association of German Culture, 203, Hermitage Office Complex, Hill Fort Road, Nampally.

Ashok Kumar, IAS, will give a talk on *The Biodiversity of Andhra Pradesh*. Ashok Kumar, one of BSAP's prominent members, is a Co-opted Member of the Biodiversity Board and Member of the State Wildlife Board. The talk will include a power point presentation, and highlight the state's important faunal and floral species, particularly the endemic ones, and the delicate ecological balance that must be maintained. His aim will be to promote awareness of our biodiversity and the need for its preservation.

For further information, please contact Shafaat Ulla (9989635223).

Report: Field trip to Zaheerabad

By Sharada Annamaraju

While I waited outside ICRISAT on Sunday, 28 October, for the others to arrive, the very first sighting was a solitary Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) zipping overhead against the dawn sky. Atop a nearby tree sat a fluffed up Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) trying to ward off the cold. By 7:00 am, twenty-odd members had gathered, and our six vehicle strong fleet set off for Zaheerabad, a hundred kilometres from Hyderabad.

On the way we spotted several White-breasted Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), an Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), and Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) gazing at our convoy with beady eyes. A Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*) glided in the distance over grassy fields. Three hours later, we arrived at the Mahindra and Mahindra factory. Lt. Col. Nasser Dubey had invited BSAP for a birding visit. After breakfast we walked towards a nearby orchard. A Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) called from the tree tops and several Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*) flitted around making jingling calls. Aasheesh Pittie drew our attention to a Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) as it zoomed past and disappeared beyond a clump of faraway bushes. Monal's keen observation revealed a diminutive Praying Mantis on the ground which we unknowingly could have stepped on! A Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) was also seen.

At 10 am it was late for decent birding. The heat was drowsy and insects dully chirped about in the grass. Accompanied by a group of children of the factory employees and some parents, we clambered into the cars and drove to another location. It was an open forest with several stretches of plantation. A Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), a family of Large Grey Babblers (*Turdoides malcolmi*), an Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) and an unidentified raptor were seen here. As time wore on, the lack of birdlife turned our attention to insects and microscopic flowers on the ground. Suddenly, an excited child spotted a Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*). He ran towards it yelling 'Peacock! Peacock!', in a sing-song voice. As twenty other children joined him in the chant, the harried bird fled for its life torpedoing across the field! A third, more pleasant location with

tree cover yielded Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*), a Common Iora (*Aegithinia tiphia*), a Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*) and a Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*). A Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*) made a brief appearance and two Indian Robins (*Saxicoloides fulcata*) chased each other playfully, the white on their wings flashing prominently.

In the afternoon Ashok Kumar gave a detailed talk on birds and JVD Moorthy, supplemented it with colourful visuals and recordings of bird calls. After thanking our hosts, we left for the city. En route, we diverted to a lake in Nizampur village, Sadashivpet. With evening approaching, there was heightened bird activity. Bay-backed (*Lanius vittatus*) and Rufous-backed Shrikes (*L. schach*) were spotted along the narrow road skirted by green fields. Among the munias, we saw the White-throated (*Lonchura malabarica*), Spotted (*L. punctulata*) and Black-headed (*L. malacca*) balanced on electric wires. Indian Rollers (*Coracias benghalensis*) and a Pied Buschat (*Saxicola caprata*) sat on perches, silhouetted. One scrawny looking tree with black bark sported a pair of Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) on its crown.

We birded at the reservoir as the sun slowly dipped into the orange and gold horizon. We saw Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Common Coots (*Fulica atra*), Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), a Purple (*Ardea pupurea*) and a Grey Heron (*A. cinerea*). The sky shimmered with House Swifts (*Apus affinis*), and a flight of swallows: Common (*Hirundo rustica*), Streak-throated (*H. fluvicola*), Wire-tailed (*H. smithii*) and Red-rumped (*H. daurica*), twisting, turning and banking. A Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) soared about and the rare



Pic: Prakriti Pittie

All smiles: The Zaheerabad group.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) sailed past. Northern Shovellers (*Anas clypeata*) flapped by in a V formation and we counted seventeen of them. A few placid Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) were spotted in the company of two Blue-tailed Bee Eaters (*Merops philippinus*) and a Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*) beyond distant reeds. Closer, in a sugarcane plantation, Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) and Black-breasted Weavers (*P. benghalensis*) twittered excitedly. Every now and then scores of them would explode into the air, whiz about and land in a different spot. Far overhead, an unidentified sandgrouse, looking like brown specks with pointy wings, flew by. Suddenly, Sanket spotted a heron-ish bird lurking in the reeds. With the light fast fading everyone set to the task of putting a name to it. It was a heavily streaked, juvenile Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*)! With the tally over 63 species, it had been an enjoyable day; and BSAP thanks Mahindra and Mahindra warmly for their hospitality.

Indoor meeting – Birds Through A Lens

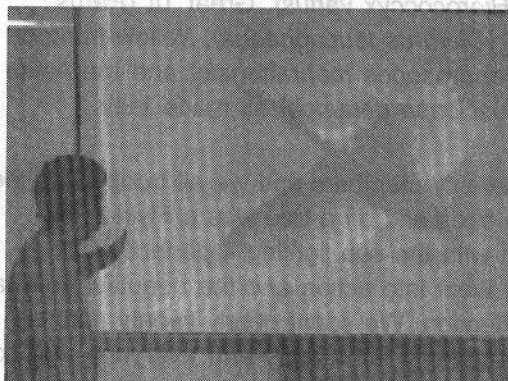
By Shanti and Umesh Mani

MS Ashok – whose very name evokes a picture of a huge tripod and a bag full of photographic equipment being lugged around – has always demonstrated tremendous passion for photography. The results of all this effort – one stunning picture after another – have always elicited gasps from all of us. So, on 27 October, at the German Centre, it was an eager audience that gathered to hear Ashok talk about seeing *Birds through a lens*.

Ashok first took us through the technical and artistic aspects of photography. He felt that it was important to understand the reason why each one of us takes photographs. Taking pictures for professional reasons or for



Pics: Umesh Mani



publication, meant that we needed to place more emphasis on the technical aspects like the subject, background, colour, composition, mood, lighting, etc. However, a technically unsound picture could also convey a story or capture an emotion just as effectively.

He also walked us through the range of equipment available – camera, lens, camera support, film or memory cards and post-processing equipment. We were happy to know that high-end equipment is not a pre-requisite for taking good pictures – Ashok quoted the instance of an award-winning photograph in a nature magazine, which was actually shot with just a point-and-shoot camera!

Ashok then moved on to some thumb-rules for taking good bird photographs. The best time for shooting birds, as we all know, is early in the morning or early evening, since the light is generally good. We learnt about the importance of shooting at eye-level, clutter-free backgrounds, and what to keep in mind while framing. Approaching birds with a lens, we learnt, is a tricky business – ‘Be Low, Slow, and Hope They Don’t Go’, Ashok puts it. Using a hide whenever possible, or shooting from the car are effective ways to be hidden. When in groups, one should avoid noise, talk in sign language and be aware of wind direction as voices carry in the wind.

He also warned against being too easily satisfied – the next photograph COULD be a better one. Besides, the value of patience cannot be over-emphasized: one should be prepared to wait for a good picture, if need be. Ashok also discussed different habitats. He advocates a healthy respect for birds and their environment, advising us against advancing on birds that are feeding or migrating, and suggests we avoid shooting nesting birds.

Ashok then showed some of his photographs to illustrate the points he had made earlier. The audience responded with ‘Wows’... the Blue-tailed Bee Eater, the frogmouth, the Bonelli’s Eagle with a lizard in its mouth, the nightjar that had Ashok chase him for over an hour, the babbler which joined him for breakfast. A picture of a Black-shouldered Kite against the backdrop of the setting sun was breathtaking. Ashok also displayed some non-bird pictures, to illustrate that we need to be alert for other photo opportunities. A Q&A session rounded off an entertaining and enlightening evening. Many of us left with the resolve that we would put these tips into practice.

Report: Field trip to Narsapur Reserve Forest

By Devika Kapadia

I love bird watching and I have been into it ever since I can remember. On Sunday, 7 October, I had to force my dad (Sushil Kapadia) to wake up and take me birding as he had gone to sleep very late. Luckily Moorty uncle, Cherie and Kulu uncle decided to join us leaving my dad without an option to cancel at the last moment. We reached the meeting point, a temple near the forest, at around 7.30 am. We were welcomed by dozens of monkeys that surrounded our car. We had to wait for some time for the other birders to arrive. While we waited, Cherie and I munched on sandwiches, locking ourselves in the car, to avoid the monkeys. The others in our car, meanwhile, were already birding.

Around 8.30 am, we decided to go into the forest. As soon we entered, a Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) was seen. It was really exciting to see this bird. In the next tree we saw a Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*) that was chirping away merrily. It seemed as if we interrupted a family get-together of the flycatchers, because there were a Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*) flitting from one tree to another and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) enjoying the lovely Sunday morning. To add music to the party was the Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyroceros birostris*) drumming in the distance with the Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) supplying backing vocals. Warblers soon joined the chorus.

Her highness the Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), though a little late, arrived in all her glory, chaperoned by the wonderful Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*). We moved ahead to a clearing in the forest and noticed a rat snake heading towards its hideout. Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*), Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*), Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*) and the Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) all made their appearance.

We were more than twenty members and we all trooped up the hill in search of more birds and on a tree was a Flying Fox hanging upside down with the sun lighting it perfectly. The cameras immediately went into action and the beautiful fruit bat was getting all the attention. We spent nearly twenty minutes admiring it. My dad suddenly felt hungry and everyone agreed to take a break for breakfast. We decided to go back to the stream and eat there. It was a super treat as everyone shared

snacks they had brought. After breakfast we proceeded towards the lake outside Narsapur town. All of us sat down under a tree to watch birds. Two members went around the lake to photograph the Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) from a closer distance. There were over 80 species of birds seen that morning.

Soon, it was noon and very hot. We decided to leave and go back home. The Narsapur forest has always been a very interesting place to visit and I have fond memories of my visits. This trip was no different.

Left above: Kulu wears a plume; Left: Rajeev conducts a show-and-tell.



Asian Openbill Stork

Pics: Umesh Mani



CLIPPINGS

These pieces - a report and an editorial - appeared in Deccan Chronicle, 17 and 18 Oct 2007 respectively

Kolleru sanctuary to lose wildlife status

By Sampat G Samritan

Rajahmundry, Oct 16:

The State is reportedly planning to withdraw the special status given to the Kolleru wildlife sanctuary. It will wind up the office of conservator of forests there and merge it with the Rajahmundry office, virtually derailing the Kolleru restoration. It is learnt that the government is making this move under pressure from local political leaders.

The Kolleru Lake Development Society has appealed to the government not to withdraw the special status. "If the government makes such a move, we will approach the Supreme Court," said noted environmentalist and society vice-president Patanjali Sastry.

The Kolleru restoration was taken up in 2006 on the directions of the Supreme Court and authorities demolished hundreds of fish tanks spread over thousands of acres of land. Out of the 77,000-acre wildlife sanctuary, nearly 35,000 acres had been encroached upon. Officials successfully removed a major stretch of encroachments during the operation. Following this, the State government accorded special status to the Kolleru wildlife sanctuary and set up the office of a conservator of forests in Eluru to protect it. However, the conservator set up check posts to monitor the transport of 'fish seed' into the lake and booked several persons for violating rules. This irked a section of local political leaders. It is feared that the removal of special status will once again pave the way for encroachment and commercial fish farming.

In addition, the Krishna administration is also planning to give away nearly 6,000 acres land falling beyond 'plus five' contour. All this is suspected to be an attempt to mollify the local population before the Assembly polls.

Death Knell

The move of the Andhra Pradesh government to withdraw the special status conferred on Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary is bound to raise the hackles of environmentalists and others concerned about ecological conservation of this picturesque area. If and when the government winds up the office of

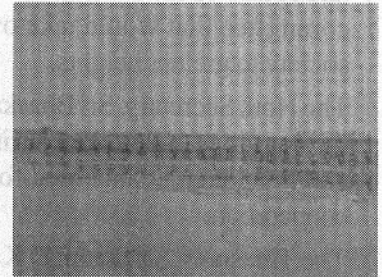
conservator of forests for the Kolleru area and merges it with the Rajahmundry office, it will sound the death knell for restoration efforts taken up by the present regime. The authorities will only be causing unprecedented damage to Kolleru lake if they succumb to pressures of political leaders especially from the ruling party to denotify the special status.

A large freshwater lake located between the Krishna and Godavari deltas, Kolleru serves as a natural flood-balancing reservoir for the two rivers. It

is fed by the seasonal Budameru and Tammileru rivers. The lake serves as a habitat for 50,000 resident and migratory birds including some rare species. The Kolleru lake was declared a wildlife sanctuary in November 1999 and designated a wetland of international importance in November 2002. Once upon a time, the Kolleru lake spread over 225 sq km.

The government had issued GO Ms 120 in October 1999 for removal of encroachments after several studies pointed at ecological degradation of the lake due to mushrooming of fish ponds, paddy fields and other obstructions. After a six-year slumber, the authorities woke up to the crisis gripping Kolleru and decided in October 2005 to remove all encroachments that had shrunk the lake area by 56,199 acres. Of this, over 20,000 acres had been encroached upon by 26 big squatters including 15 leaders from the Telugu Desam and eight from the Congress. Resisting pressure from these leaders as also the Left parties, Chief Minister YS Rajashekhar Reddy ordered 'Operation Kolleru' and sought World Bank assistance of Rs 2,650 crores for the Kolleru restoration project after removing all encroachments.

However, since March 2007, several politicians have been raising a hue and cry over alleged harassment of people and mounting pressure on the government to sort out their 'grievances.' The cabinet sub-committee on Kolleru has been unable to withstand their pressures. But the government has no right to destroy the State's natural heritage in a bid to serve vested interests.



Kolleru lake

Annual General Meeting – Report

By Sushil Kapadia

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh was held on 15 October 2007 at Vidyaranya School, Saifabad, Hyderabad at 6.00 pm.

The President, Sri Siraj Taher, welcomed the members and briefed them about the past, present and future of the society. He hoped that the new committee that would take over would take the society to greater heights.

The Hon. Secretary, Sri Bhaskar Rao, spoke about the activities undertaken during the last one year and thanked all concerned for their support and cooperation.

The Treasurer, Sri Sushil D Kapadia, read out the financial statements of the society for the period 1-4-2006 to 31-3-2007 which was okayed and passed by the members. As elections were due, Mr Ashok Kumar acted as the Election Officer and the following members were elected to form the committee:

1. Siraj Taher
2. MS Kulkarni
3. JVD Moorthy
4. Sushil D Kapadia
5. K Nandkumar
6. Sheetal Vyas
7. Arjun Surendra
8. Shweta Vyas
9. K Bharadwaj
10. T Ravi Shankar

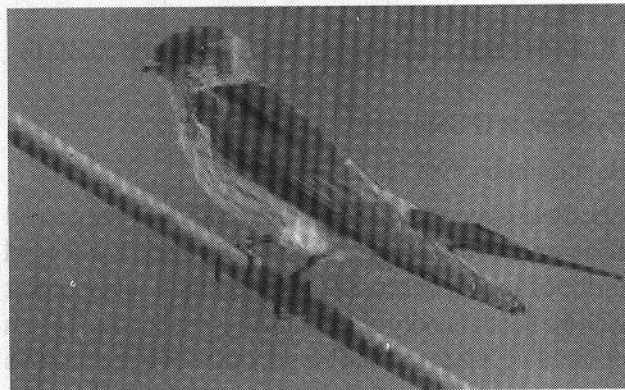
Sri JVD Moorthy proposed the vote of thanks.

The Executive Committee meeting was held on 26 October 2007 at the residence of Sushil Kapadia and the following members were selected for the posts:

President	Siraj Taher
Vice President	MS Kulkarni
Vice President	JVD Moorthy
Hon. Secretary	Sushil Kapadia
Treasurer	K Bharadwaj

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)



© Nerdybirders.com

Order: Passeriformes; **Family:** Hirundinidae;

Genus: *Cecropis*; **Size:** 20-23 cm.

Etymology: *Hirundo* = Latin for swallow, *daurica* = belonging to the Daurian region in SE Siberia.

Hirundo, in fact, was originally the Latin word for Martlet, a mythical bird without legs, always shown in flight.

Local name: *Masjid-ababil* (Hindi).

Description: It is a glossy dark blue bird with the distinctive deeply forked swallow tail and a chestnut rump which is sometimes very pale. It has a chestnut hind collar and pale whitish underparts with thin streaks.

Distribution: Widespread resident found around hilly forests, wetlands and open rocky areas. Not found in altitudes above 500 m.

Behaviour: Very graceful and swift flyers. They swoop on insects while airborne. Very gregarious during non-nesting period and are seen roosting in large groups.

Nesting: The nest is a retort-shaped structure built against ceilings or under overhanging rocks. It has a narrow tubular entrance and the chamber is lined with feathers to protect the eggs. Season is from April to August; 3-4 white eggs are laid.

Call: A rather soft sweet flight call something like *chew-ik*

Trivia: The Hindi name for the bird translates 'mosque swallow' because of its affinity for high domed roofs of mosques and cave temples as substitutes for cliffs and overhangs. This characteristic is also shared by its much larger cousin, a native of Africa going by the name Mosque Swallow (*Hirundo senegalensis*).

For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Siraj A Taher, Sheetal Vyas. **Pitta email:** sheetalvyas@gmail.com. To contact the Society, **write to:** Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. **Society membership (Rs):** Admission: 100; Annual: 200; Student: 100 per annum. Life: 2,000. Add Rs 25/- for outstation cheques.



Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

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Party Time!

Saturday, 5 January 2008, 7.00 pm: Kapadia Nivas, Somajiguda.

Tired of seeing your birding pals in the same dull greens, browns and greys? If you've ever wondered what they look like in non-birding plumage, here's your chance to see for yourself. BSAP is having its Annual Dinner and all members are invited with their families and friends.

The venue is Sushil Kapadia's residence: Kapadia Nivas, 6-3-660, Kapadia Lane, Somajiguda, Hyderabad - 500082, and cost is Rs 200 per head. Please register with Sushil Kapadia (9393319333) or Shanti Mani (9391008302).

HSBC BirdRace

Sunday, 2 December 2007, 5.30 am: Hyderabad Public School Gates.

The HSBC BirdRace, which is being conducted in several Indian cities this winter, comes to Hyderabad in the first week of December. The concept is simple: to form teams and see as many bird species as possible in twelve hours. Hyderabad's many hotspots afford excellent birding and with wintering migrants bolstering the species count, old-hands and rookies rubbing shoulders, the race is tremendous fun.

Website <http://www.indiabirdraces.com/> has information on the concept and rules and Sushil Kapadia (9393319333) may be contacted for anything else.

Field Outing

Sunday, 16 December 2007, 6.30 am: Manjira Barrage, Sangareddy.

Manjira Reservoir, about 50 km from Hyderabad, is one of our important wetlands and harbours a host of water birds including Painted Storks, openbills, herons and ibises. The barrage has also been a good place to sight raptors.

This will be a morning trip. Carry plenty of water and snacks. To coordinate, please call Shafaat Ulla (9989635223) or Siraj Taher (9848272520).

Camp

21-24 December 2007: Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary, Tirupati.

The exciting birding trip to Mamandur in Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary that was announced earlier has been moved from 14-17 December to the following weekend. Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary around the Tirupati hills, with its pristine and thick forests, supports a wide variety of flora and fauna and is also a trekkers' paradise.

For further information, please call Shafaat Ulla (9989635223).

Report – Trip to Andhra Pradesh Police Academy

By Shafaat Ulla

The AP Police Academy does not need any introduction – this is a premier institute spread over a 175-acre site near Himayatnagar. The director, Dr Gopinath Reddy, very kindly invited our members to visit the academy for a birdwatching trip and that's where over twenty of us headed, at the crack of dawn, on the very nippy and sunny Sunday of 18 November.

We were received by Mr Sameer at the Senior Officers' Mess. Even before we could actually proceed on our planned walk, the excitement started in the parking lot and binoculars were out in a jiffy as we spotted a

Pics: Sharada Annamaraju



The interesting rock-face, or rather, face-rock at APPA.

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), an Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) and some warblers in the adjoining bushes. In the meantime we were joined by Mr Gowrishanker, a photographer and

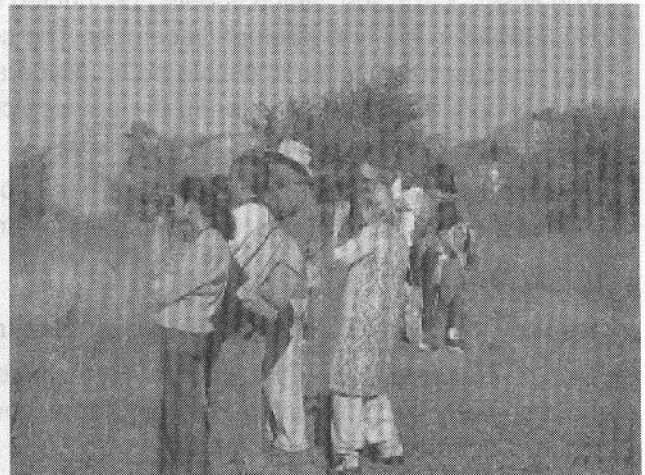
our guide for the morning. We proceeded in real earnest, exploring the lush, well-planned campus with its various types of trees, strategically planted around roads, buildings and sports facilities. Quite a bit of the area is also left undisturbed and supports the original flora.

We were soon rewarded by the sighting of a White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*), Brahminy Starling (*Sturnus pagodarum*), Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) and many others. The list kept growing as we ambled along the campus, split into small groups.

When we came to the edge of the compound, we were fascinated by the wonderful rock formations there, which are said to be about two billion years old. We proceeded through the scrub and thorn forest, intermixed with trees – typical of the Deccan Plateau. Here we came across a rich harvest of birds:

Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), a flock of about 30 Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*), Rufous-backed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) among others. Two species eluded identification, which in all probability were Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) and Booted Warbler (*Hippolais caligata*); I however would not bet my life on that.

We continued through the brush and came upon a massive rock in the shape of a man's head. It was a most amusing sight and we hope the academy's management will take necessary steps to preserve it as also the other remarkable rock formations. We finally turned around and headed for the mess not before seeing quite a few more species: a Red-winged Bush-Lark (*Mirafra erythroptera*), Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*).



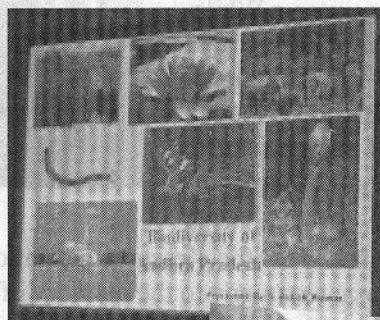
Birds yonder and the sun on our shoulders.

By ten o'clock the sun had turned fierce and we were quite exhausted. We made our way to the mess where a sumptuous breakfast awaited us – just what we needed most. After having our fill, we compared notes as usual to compile the list of species seen. The total came to about 45 bird species, quite satisfying for a three hour outing. We thank the Director and his staff for the wonderful hospitality extended to us and for making the trip a memorable one.

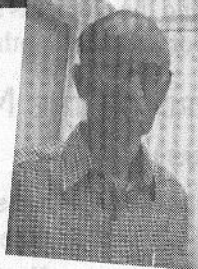
Report – Indoor meeting

By Ravi Mundoli

What connects a Japanese musical instrument and an Indian Railways bogie? How can you tell a deer from an antelope? What happens when you pick up a Jerdon's Courser? These intriguing questions (and many, many others) were answered at Mr Ashok Kumar's talk on *The Biodiversity of Andhra Pradesh*, held on 16 November, at the Association of German Culture.



Mr Ashok Kumar, one of BSAP's prominent and longstanding members, walked us through an engrossing 90 minutes or so of slides and factoids, spiced up with the occasional anecdote. While birds and birding were never far from anyone's thoughts, what made the presentation really interesting was the holistic and associative approach to wilderness and wildlife.



We saw a biodiversity map of the state, with the locations of all the important sanctuaries and national parks prominently marked, and got a birds' eye view of the different kinds of fauna that inhabit these beautiful places. We learnt of the three types of forests to be found in Andhra Pradesh, the different kinds of vegetation that one runs into in these forests, and the unfortunate rate at which they are dwindling.

The grand tour of the arboretum was followed by a close look at the four-legged denizens of the jungle. Ungulates, bovines, felines, ursines, lupines, and vulpines were all considered and pondered over. Cosines seem to be the only *-ines* that escaped our notice!

The creepy-crawlies were not left behind, as we ventured along the forest floor, watching a krait from a respectful distance here; rooting out a tarantula there; and gasping at the myriad colours of a host of butterflies.

Mr Ashok Kumar also helped dispel a few erroneous notions that we had about the nature and behaviour of some creatures, and left us with a few thoughts on how we as ordinary citizens and nature lovers can contribute to preserving and promoting the incredible biological richness that we happen to live in the midst of.

Remembering Salim Ali

By Anita Pillay

Salim Ali, who was born 12 November 1896 and died on 27 July 1987 at the relatively 'young' age of 91, till the end remained an ever-curious person with a passion for birds. Indeed with Shakespeare we can marvel at the 'special providence in the fall of a sparrow' – the incident that led young Salim Ali to become a birder – because ornithology in India is alive and hopping about in various hues and sizes, largely due to his efforts.

BSAP celebrated his birthday on 12 November in an appropriate way: by joining a 'Wagtail walk' organised by the Centre for Environmental Education at Sanjeevia Park, Hyderabad. 6.30 am, of what turned out to be a very pleasant morning, saw us entering the park with our binoculars at the ready. Almost immediately we spotted a Pied Starling (*Sturnus contra*), a local resident which had met us on previous visits. We strolled along the edge of the Hussain Sagar, one of the largest man-made lakes in Asia, some 444 years old. The fact that it is exactly four times as old as Salim Ali who would have been 111 if he had been with us today, seemed somehow appropriate.

At once we encountered the Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) and a large number of Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) flying around dangling their reddish legs. We saw Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) bobbing like corks under the bridge yonder and in contrast an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) sulking on a rock and a Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) drying spread-out wings in its typical heraldic pose. As we walked a Grey-headed Starling (*Sturnus malabaricus*) was found perched on a tree, and we also sighted a variety of colourful birds: Small Green Bee-Eaters (*Merops orientalis*), Golden Orioles (*Oriolus kundoo*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) and Common Myna (*Acridotheres*

tristis). Another satisfying moment was spotting our state bird, the Indian Roller (*Coracias bengalensis*).

It was a pleasant outing, and as we walked along the water we saw Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*); a pair of Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) winging their way across the water, a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) poised to dive for a catch, Common Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) hawking the air for insects. Most importantly, we saw a Large Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) after whom the walk was named.

We were thoughtfully served tea under the trees and as we compared our bird lists, it was a good time to reflect on what Dr Ali said about bird watching that it was "chiefly for the pleasure and elation of the spirit". The fact that there were many participants on a working day was a testimony to the memory of 'India's original bird man'. In the words of the Bard, his life had been 'gentle, and the elements so mix'd in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world "This was a man!"' When comes such another?



Along the waterfront.

Pic courtesy: Udayachandran Thampy

BIRD OF THE MONTH

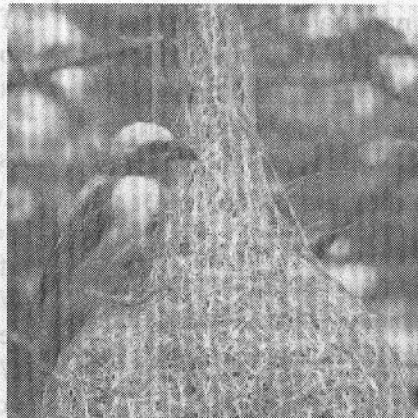
Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)

Order: Passeriformes; **Family:** Ploceidae; **Genus:** *Ploceus*; **Size:** 15-16 cm.

Etymology: *Ploceus*, from Greek *plokeus* = weaver or braider; from Latin *philippinus* = of the Philippines.

Local name: *Baya*, *Son-Chiri* (Hindi); *Pasupu pitta*, *Gijigadu* (Telugu).

Description: A sparrow-sized bird with a stout conical bill and short square tail. Non-breeding males and females look alike with dark brown streaked fulvous buff above and plain whitish fulvous below; while the bill is horn-coloured. Breeding males however, don a bright yellow crown, dark brown mask and blackish brown bill. Upper-parts also are dark brown streaked with yellow, with a yellow breast and cream buff below.



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Distribution: Throughout the Indian subcontinent.

Habitat: Found in large flocks near open cultivation and reed beds.

Behaviour: Baya Weavers tend to forage in flocks. They

are social, gregarious birds, given to gleaning paddy and other grain in harvested fields.

Nesting: The Baya's nest is an architectural wonder. Typically hanging over water from palm fronds or branches, this is a nest compactly woven with rough-edged strips of fresh grass; a retort shaped structure with a long tube leading up to a side entrance. The male invites passing females to his partially built nest. Once approved, he goes on to complete the nest, then darting off to entice other females while the female lays 2-4 eggs and incubates. Nesting season coincides with the monsoons.

Call: A sparrow-like *chit chit chit*. In breeding season, males follow this with a joyous *chee-ee*, accompanied by flapping of wings.

Trivia: Fine architects they may be but Bayas are not without real estate problems. They are frequently bullied out of their homes by smaller cousins, the munias, particularly the White-throated who use abandoned homes with alacrity.

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